The Kalyana-Kalpataru



वीणापुस्तकरञ्जितहस्ते। भगवति भारति देवि नमस्ते॥

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Commercial advertisements are not accepted for publication in The Kalyana-Kalpataru.

Under very extraordinary circumstances beyond our control, the publication of the Woman Number has been delayed. The readers are requested to bear with us and excuse us for any inconvenience caused to them due to this delay.

—*Editor*

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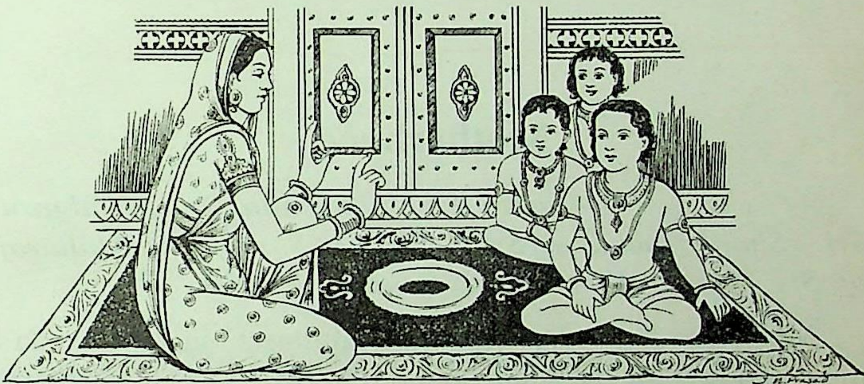
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ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात्पूर्णमुदच्यते। पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते॥



The KALYANA-KALPATARU

OR
THE BLISS
A MONTHLY FOR THE PROPAGATION OF SPIRITUAL IDEAS AND LOVE FOR GOD

New Series
October, 1995 No. 1
Vol. XLI

ब्यापक ब्रह्म निरंजन निर्गुन बिगत बिनोद।
सो अज प्रेम भगति बस कौसल्या कें गोद॥

"The unborn and all-pervading *Brahma*, who is untainted by *Māyā*, without attributes and devoid of play, has sought shelter in the arms of Kausalyā, conquered by her love and devotion."

(*Mānasa* I. 198)

Motherhood

—Ananta Sri Vibhushita Sri Jagadguru Sri Shankaracharya Sri Jayendra Sarasvatiji Maharaj of Sri Kanchi Kama Koti Pitham

Motherhood is the essential fulfilment in a woman's life—bestowed by the Almighty Lord in His divine dispensation. The biological and anatomical peculiarities in a woman's body are not the only manifestations that make a woman complete.

It is pure grace in her mind which is instinctive never artificial—that makes her divine. The man has to move heaven and earth to achieve this divine character.

The love for the offspring that a woman bestows on her child is subtler and purer than the love she professes to have for her husband. In a given moment if a woman is asked to choose between her husband and her child, she would prefer the child with its attendant responsibilities rather than the protection of the husband she could await of from her husband. A woman will not forsake her child—whatever be the other attractions and inducements she is offered in her life. It is this aspect of very natural grace of motherhood in a woman that finds the first mention in the *Sahasranāma* (thousand names of *Devī*) as *Śrī Mātā*.

In the *Stotras* of *Devī* in any Indian language—she is called simply mother. Other attributes adorn her only extolling this aspect of motherhood.

Even the awakening in the minds of masses of India for attaining independance, was made in the name of *Bhārata Mātā*.

A woman may be loved by a man in his individual capacity of being a husband, as a sister by a brother and as a daughter by her parents. But she claims universal respect only for her motherhood.

Whatever be the achievements of a woman—as a leader, as a musician, as an athlete, as a sportswoman, as a high officer or as a politician—her pride as a mother is unique and unequalled. It makes her worthy of worship. No other country in the whole world can boast of this distinction of making a woman greater than man.

It is found in our *Śāstras* and *Purāṇas* that whoever disgraces a woman falls irretrievably from grace of the Lord and loses all prosperity in this world and in the other.

Women must keep this truth in their minds and make their lives worthy of this great honour and be blessed of divine grace.

Nārāyaṇa Nārāyaṇa.

Loose life is not perfect freedom. Some women of India have ruined themselves by taking advantage of this false freedom. What is there in a woman's life if her purity is lost ? She is only a living corpse if there is no purity, although she is rolling in wealth and moves in high circles in society. Promiscuous mixing will lead to disastrous results. Even *Ṛṣis* and *Yogīs* who are clad in rags, who live in seclusion, will be pulled down by the dark forces of nature if they are careless. Then what to speak of women who daily eat dainties and sweetmeats, who are clad in perfumed velvet and silk with lace borders, who are given to too much mixing, who do not lead a life of self-control, who have no religious training and discipline and who have no idea of inner life and the religion of emancipation.

—*Swami Sivananda*

Injunctions for Widows

—Late Sri Jayadayal Goyandka

A widow lady should take meals once in a day—that too possibly in daytime, should sleep on the ground; wear simple and white clothes and observe the prescribed vows according to her physical strength. A widow should never apply any unguent, never chew betel-leaves, never use any fragrance not braid her hairs, nor wear coloured clothes or ornaments and should never apply black marks in her eyes. Should always overpower the tendencies of lustfulness and anger and her senses, not indulge in nasty-wordy or heated debate, always perform her domestic duties actively without any laziness and while performing her duties should engross herself in the devotion of the Lord. It is said in the scriptures—

विधवानां तु नारीणां ब्रह्मचर्यं सदैव हि।
न गृह्णीयाद् रक्तवर्णं न खट्वां मैथुनं न च॥

(*Bṛhaddharma Purāṇa*, *Uttara*. VIII. 11)

"The widow ladies should always observe the rules of celibacy. They should neither wear the coloured clothes nor sleep on the cot and in no case should they indulge in sexual intercourse."

यौवने विविधा भूषा चारुकेशादिधारणम्।
देहशोभा च नारीणां विधवानां न शोभते॥

(*Bṛhaddharma Purāṇa*, *Pūrva*. IV. 33-34)

"Bedecking the body, decorating the hairs and trying to enhance the bodily beauty—are quite unbecoming of the young ladies in their widowhood."

ताम्बूलं विधवास्त्रीणां यतीनां ब्रह्मचारिणाम्।
संन्यासिनां च गोमांससुरातुल्यं श्रुतौ श्रुतम्॥

(*Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, *Śrīkṛṣṇa*. 83. 100)

"It is heard from the *Vedas* that chewing betels is equal to eating beaf and drinking liquor for widow ladies, *Yatis,* renouncers and celibates."

केशवेणी जटारूपं न क्षौरं तीर्थकं विना।
तैलाभ्यङ्गं न कुर्वीत न हि पश्यति दर्पणम्॥

(*Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa, Śrīkṛṣṇa*. 83. 104)

"The widow lady should not arrange her hairs in the braided style but she should tie them in the form of matted locks. Apart from the holy places nowhere else should she get her hairs cut. She should apply neither oil to her body nor look into the mirror and see her face."

मुखं च परपुंसां च यात्रानृत्यं महोत्सवम्।
नर्तनं गायनं चैव सुवेषं पुरुषं शुभम्॥

(*Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa, Śrīkṛṣṇa*. 83. 105)

"She should not look at the faces of other persons, not watch any type of dance and any celebrating occasion, not enjoy music and in no case look at a good-looking presentable male."

These widow ladies should have their lives simplest possible and full of penance. All types of luxuries, enjoyments, taste or fashionable things should be given up. Living a detached and dispassionate life, should absorb themselves to the devotion of the Lord.

The widow ladies are recommended to study the rules prescribed for them in the scriptures. If they are illiterate they should approach their fathers, brothers, sons, elder brothers-in-law and father-in-law etc., provided they are virtuous, and the great men well-versed in the scriptures and of dispassionate and renouncing nature and hear those rules and regulations and according to their capacity, translate them into practice but they should not be caught in the claws of the impersonators and snobs in the guise of *Mahātmās*. Such persons who are slaves of gold and women should be avoided at every cast. A lady should not make a man as her preceptor howsoever exalted he may be because only the husband is a real and authorised preceptor to

a lady. If the husband expires then the Supreme husband that is Almighty God is there who is a universal preceptor for all. A lady should concentrate all her devotion in Him and according to the injunctions of the scriptures observing her duties, considering the body, the world and the enjoyments to be unstable and perishable and the embodiment of sorrow should give them up giving no importance to them at all like a blade of grass. Living an austere life this way they should take refuge in the Lord so that they may get fame in this world and the best possible place in the otherworld. They should not renounce their *Dharma* even under most trying and disastrous circumstances because it is *Dharma* itself that accompanies a person after death. Getting an opportunity to have birth as human being it is the utmost duty to try for the ultimate good of one's ownself.

This human body is very difficult to attain. By the grace of God or with a great stroke of luck we happen to get this. Śrī Tulasīdāsa says—

कबहुँक करि करुना नर देही। देत ईस बिनु हेतु सनेही।
बड़ें भाग मानुष तनु पावा। सुर दुर्लभ सब ग्रंथन्हि गावा॥

"Rarely does God who loves the *Jīva* without any self-interest, graciously bestow on it a human form."

"It is by good fortune that you have secured a human body, which—as declared by all the scriptures—is difficult even for the gods to attain."

But this human body is perishable and momentary. When will the death take toll, even this much is unknown. Therefore one should do as early as possible, the thing that may be capable of sublimating the soul and ultimately liberating it. The pleasure that appears in the worldly enjoyments and this body too, is deceptive and only appearance. In reality there is no pleasure at all. So abandoning all enjoyments the *Bhajana* of the Lord should be practised constantly. The Lord Himself said in the *Gītā*—

अनित्यमसुखं लोकमिमं प्राप्य भजस्व माम्॥

(IX. 33)

"For this reason, while attaining this ephemeral human body devoid of any real pleasure, always remember and worship Me."

The Lord has described and defined *Bhajana*, its varieties and fruits—

मन्मना भव मद्भक्तो मद्याजी मां नमस्कुरु।
मामेवैष्यसि युक्त्वैवमात्मानं मत्परायणः॥

(IX. 34)

"Fix your mind in Me, be My devotee, worship Me and pay your salutations to Me. This way harnessing your Self in Me and getting merged in Me, you will certainly attain to Me."

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घृतकुम्भसमा नारी तप्ताङ्गारसमः पुमान्।
तस्माद्घृतं च वह्निं च नैकत्र स्थापयेद् बुधः॥
मात्रा स्वस्रा दुहित्रा वा न विविक्तासनो भवेत्।
बलवानिन्द्रियग्रामो विद्वांसमपि कर्षति॥

"A woman is like a jar full of melted butter and the man is similar to a burning charcoal. A wise person therefore, should not allow the ghee and the fire to be together. While in solitude one should not be in the company of his own mother, sister or even daughter alone. The senses are very strong and they drag forcibly even the scholars."

या नारी तु पतिं त्यक्त्वा मनोवाक्कायकर्मभिः॥
रहः करोति वै जारं गत्वा वा पुरुषान्तरम्।
तेन कर्मविपाकेन सा नारी विधवा भवेत्॥

"The woman who abandoning her husband entertains a paramour with her mind, speech, body or action and tries to get another man, becomes a widow as the result of her actions."

—*Skandapurāṇa*

A Request to Mātṛ-Śakti (Women)

—*Swami Ramsukhdas*

In modern times women are much slighted and disgraced. Instead of being regarded as respected mothers they are considered means (instruments) for sensual pleasures. The woman meant for sensual pleasures is practically a sense-object. Such a woman does not deserve as much respect as a mother does. But the lustful persons, who consider the woman a means of sensual pleasures and are slaves to her, can't understand this fact. A girl gets married in order to become a mother rather than to become an instrument for pleasures. The parents of both the boy and the girl marry the boy and the girl so that the family succession may continue. But today women are abstained from becoming mothers and they are being transformed into instruments for sensual pleasures. How much disgraceful it is to women in general?

A woman,in fact,is a mother. She is the mother of both—males and females while she is the wife of only the male. If a man is virtuous, he sanctifies his own family only, but a noble woman sanctifies both the families—her father's family as well as the family of her in-laws. King Janaka while addressing Sītā says—

पुत्रि पबित्र किए कुल दोऊ।

(*Mānasa* II. 287. 1)

In our scriptures women have been very much honoured. For their safety they have been ordained by the scriptures to remain under the control of their father or husband or son so that they may not go astray. If a woman becomes an employee it is humiliation for her. In her house she is a queen, while

outside her house she is an employee. In the house she remains under the control of one man while outside her house she has to remain under the control of several men and women and has to tolerate the scolding and humiliating by her superiors which is against her tender heart and nature. She deserves honour rather than humiliation. The control by the father, husband or son is not meant to make her subordinate but to make her very much independent. Within the four walls of her empire, she is a 'Ma' or 'Grand Ma' and is respected by her sons and grandsons but out of her circle she becomes simply an 'old woman' and is slighted everywhere.

In these days it is said that women should have equal rights with men, but the scriptures have granted them special privilege.

सहस्त्रं तु पितृन्माता गौरवेणातिरिच्यते।

(*Manu*. II. 145)

"The rank of the mother has been considered a thousand times more than that of a father."

सर्ववन्द्येन यतिना प्रसूर्वन्द्या प्रयत्नतः।

(*Skanda Purāṇa, Kāśī*. XI. 50)

"Even the *Saṁnyāsī* whom all people pay obeisance should pay obeisance to the mother with care."

In these days the womb is examined and if there is a girl in the womb, abortion is caused. Is it the right of equality to women?

The feeling which is roused by the word 'mother' is not roused by the word 'woman'. Therefore Śrī Śaṅkarācārya addressed Lord Kṛṣṇa as 'Mother' 'मातःकृष्णाभिधाने' (*Prabodha* 244). In the *Upaniṣads* by the declaration 'मातृदेवो भव', 'पितृदेवो भव', there is order that the mother should be served first of all. In the national song 'वन्दे मातरम्' there is obeisance to the mother. In Hindu *Dharma* there is great importance to worship Maternal-Power (Goddess). Goddess Durgā is also one of the five deities of the rank of God. Several volumes such as *Devībhāgavata* and *Durgāsaptaśatī* etc., have been written to depict the power of mothers. All women of the world have been regarded as

the forms of Goddess Durgā—

विद्याः समस्तास्तव देवि भेदाः स्त्रियः समस्ताः सकला जगत्सु।

(*Durgāsaptaśatī* XI. 6)

But voluptuous persons can't understand the importance of a woman as a mother because they regard her as an instrument for sensual pleasure.

In the scriptures there is no mention at all anywhere that a man should slight a woman, trouble her, divorce her and beat her. Not only this but even if a deadly crime is committed by her, she should not be beaten but she should rather be forgiven.

Bhīṣma was the protector of the *Kaurava* army—

अपर्याप्तं तदस्माकं बलं भीष्माभिरक्षितम्।

(*Gītā* I. 10)

But Duryodhana ordered his army to protect (guard) him—"भीष्ममेवाभिरक्षन्तु भवन्तः सर्व एव हि॥" (*Gītā* I. 11). The reason was that Duryodhana knew that Bhīṣma would not use his arms and weapons on Śikhaṇḍī even at the risk of his own life. Śikhaṇḍī was first a woman at birth and then she got converted into a man. But Bhīṣma still regarded him as a woman and therefore he didn't use his weapon against him. The result was that Bhīṣma was killed by Śikhaṇḍī. This is an example how women were honoured in India.

According to the ordinance of the scriptures a wife is entitled to share half of the reward of virtuous actions performed by her husband but she has not to share the fruit of his evil actions. Thus she shares half of his reward in free. In the society also it is noticed that the wife of a doctor or a professor even when she is uneducated is called Mrs. Dr. X or Mrs. Prof. Y. In fact in these days there is predominance of pride. Therefore women instead of becoming polite and modest, talk of pride and enhance their pride which is the cause of ruin. They think—"If males do so, why should we not do? Why should we lag behind?" Such a thought enhances only pride, and pride is the root of the cycle of birth and death as well as of many worries and sufferings.

संसृत मूल सूलप्रद नाना। सकल सोक दायक अभिमाना॥

(*Mānasa* VII. 74. 3)

Can a person with pride understand the facts of the scriptures? No, she/he can't.

Mothers have played a very important role for the welfare of the world. They have killed demons such as Raktabīja etc. They have safeguarded our Hindu culture. In these days also it is observed that women have more knowledge of functions, festivals, family customs, traditions and particular days of *Śrāddha* (when oblation of cooked rice balls and water etc., should be offered to manes) than men. A man belonging to his own family forgets the family customs, traditions and other ceremonies but a woman who comes from a different family remembers them. Women in a larger number go to temples, attend divine discourses, programmes of narration of the scriptures, observe fasts, chant the divine name, recite the holy books such as the *Rāmāyaṇa* and offer charity than men do. It means that they are the protector of our culture.

At present by the advertisement and propaganda of unnatural methods for birth-control women are losing their modesty, chastity, character and good conduct etc. Consequently they are becoming just instruments for sensual pleasures. If women lose their character, what will happen to the country? What guidance will the coming generation receive from their first preceptor, the Mother? If a woman gets spoiled, both the daughters and sons born of her, will be spoiled. But if a woman follows the virtuous path, her offspring will not be spoiled even if her husband is spoiled. Therefore it is the duty of every human being to safeguard the character and modesty of women, respect and honour them and not to let them be slighted and humiliated.

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Child-Control

—Late Sri Hanumanprasad Poddar

At present for several reasons the child-control is a burning topic which appears to be necessary from certain points of view. It is a fact that in a poor country like India in this age of dearness numerous issues are the cause of worries to a father and the child-control or making the number limited can decidedly be assumed beneficial but what to do? It is the design of the creator. The past actions are also something the fruits of which is unavoidable. A *Jīva* will certainly take birth where he is predestined to take—it is a law. But even if somebody does not agree with this law, the best way of child-control is the restraint and only restraint over the senses. Not being disrespectful to her good intentions of Miss Sengar—a foreign lady—regarding her arguments in favour of birth-control and its means, it is but necessary to say that the means suggested by her are not only harmful from the angles of ethics, rightful conduct and religiousness but are even sinful too. In this type of system of birth-control there is a great probability that the sexual corruption and voluptuousness will be materialized unobstructed and unbridled. Mahātmā Gāndhī wrote in one of his articles—"These unnatural means have produced such evil results with which people are little acquainted. What turmoil has been created by the secret sexual indulgences of the school going boys and girls, I know.....I know there are many such youthful girls in schools and colleges who alongwith their course-books read the literature related to the artificial birth-control and monthly magazines with great interests and keep

Gandhi - Birth control means fulfilment of voluptuous desire

these unnatural equipments with them. It is impossible to have these means limited among the married women only. As a matter of fact the very sanctity of marriage ceremony disappears that very moment when its natural result—procreating child—is ignored and the beastly fulfilment of voluptuous desire is taken to be the only utility of marriage."

It is clear from the above what a heinous type of beastly sexuality is occupying the place of sanctity in the human hearts due to this movement of birth-control and how our immature-minded boys and girls are victimised and paving the path of their destruction.

It is only restraint that is required for birth-control. If there is a gap of five years between two deliveries, the problem of birth-control will automatically be solved.

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The following sixteen varieties of women are known to be mothers as declared by the *Vedas*—

स्तन्यदात्री गर्भधात्री भक्ष्यदात्री गुरुप्रिया।
अभीष्टदेवपत्नी च पितुः पत्नी च कन्यका॥
सगर्भजा च या भगिनी स्वामिपत्नी प्रियाप्रसूः।
मातुर्माता पितुर्माता सोदरस्य प्रिया तथा॥
मातुः पितुश्च भगिनी मातुलानी तथैव च।
जनानां वेदविहिता मातरः षोडश स्मृताः॥

"(1) A foster-mother (2) One who holds in the womb (3) One who feeds (4) The wife of the preceptor (5) The consorts of one's chosen deity (6) Wife of the father (7) A virgin (8) A real sister (9) The wife of the master (10) Mother-in-law (11) Maternal grandmother (12) Grandmother (13) The wife of the brother (14) The sister of the mother (15) The sister of the father and (16) The wife of the maternal uncle."

—*Brahma Vaivarta*

Woman through Ages

—S. K. Trivedi

The Fair Sex—

Barring a few exceptions the entire creation consists of the twin, species—male and female, exhibiting distinct traits to differentiate. The latter, termed commonly as the better half or the fair sex, has been an object of mystery, romance, cajoling and coaxing for the other from the very beginning. As a daughter, wife and mother she has kept the universe going.

Such is the importance of the female that even God is unthinkable without her. As Goddess or *Śakti* she is with Him also to invigorate. In the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* the all-pervading Goddess has been worshipped as divine mother, mother of the world, nature, wrath, eternity, virginity, foster mother, joy, protector, success, accomplishment etc.

Woman, the female of mankind, has been known for such desirable human virtues as affection, attachment, dedication, devotion, endurance, forbearance, forgiveness, generosity, modesty, patience, sacrifice, self-denial and tolerance. She has played pivotal role in the formation and existence of the society. She is the real householder since it is she who holds the whole house together. Without her, man might have still been wandering in the forest. Civilization owes its existence to woman. She tamed the wild man and made him useful to the society at large.

But her journey from Eden Garden or the Himalayas to the present space and electronic age has not been smooth, simple or straight. Abandoned by Manu, rebuked by Adam, chided by

the surroundings, scoffed at by Dakṣa, abused by the society.........She pursued her path (often bumpy and zig-zag) with utmost care of and undeviating attention on *Mānava,* the seed of mankind; brought solace to the soul of errant Manu, fought the death itself to bring Satyavān back to life, Kaikeyī made the wheel of Daśaratha's chariot rotate on her wrist so as to bring glory to the whole clan..........And when needed, committed *Jauhara* for the sake of her and her family's honour.

Equal Partner—

Woman occupied a very important place in the society during the Vedic age. She was the master of the house, eternal companion to her husband, respected as daughter, wife and mother. The divine seers and sages sang praises of her virtues and upright conduct. No auspicious act was complete without her participation. Man could not perform sacrificial rites without wife. Her advice was a must in each and every walk of life. In the *Ṛgveda* period woman was completely free. She was brought up and educated like the male issues. There were such scholars (among them) in that age as Viśvavārā, Ghoṣā, Lopāmudrā, Urvaśī and Apālā. Many hymns of the *Ṛgveda* were composed by poetesses. In Upanishadic Age woman had unhindered access to education. There were women teachers (during that time) called *Upādhyāyās* or *Ācāryās.* Every father desired his daughter to be a *Paṇḍitā* (erudite scholar). There are examples to show that military training was also given to women. We come across many upright and scholarly women in the epic age, too. Kuntī is said to have been well-versed in the *Atharvaveda.* It must have been a feast for the dismayed eyes of the scholars and royalty in Mahārāja Janaka's court to watch Gārgī shooting poser after poser and Yājñavalkya, in discomfort, hiding behind the shield of *Atipraśna.* Something like Portia (in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*) not only accomplishing the seemingly impossible task of snatching Antonio from the clutches of blood-thirsty Shylock but also turning the table on him.

Diminishing Return—

Gradually, as intellect yielded to might, the male domination adversely affected the social status of woman. Child-marriage system started during the last days of the Later Vedic Age. This alone was enough to pull the mat from under the feet of woman. It crushed her morale, fettered her, confined her to the four walls of the house and dwarfed her mentally. This beginning of the end of her freedom might have satisfied the ego of man but ruined the fabric of the society for centuries. How could a chariot be expected to run on uneven wheels?

Polygamy followed child-marriage, making the life of woman more miserable. Polygamy does not involve lust only. It contains an element of greed and exploitation also—greed for more dowry and free labour. There is no other rationale behind polygamy among the poor (specially in Asian and African countries where an unemployed husband virtually does nothing. He is idling the whole day and lives on the wives' earnings only. These wives are no better than slaves or bonded labour). All this unexpected development made the woman curse her existence. The birth of a daughter became synonymous with calamity. Even Buddhism, which shook the senile and almost fossilized society to activity didn't do much to re-establish the woman. Forlorn Yaśodharā found herself unwelcome in the new order of her enlightened husband. But the woman did not surrender to fate. She resisted the onslaught to the best of her ability and produced such great poetesses as Śīlabhaṭṭārikā Prabhu Devī and Vijayaṅka (who is supposed to be second to Kālidāsa only).

Redemption—

Woman regained her last glory in the Mauryan era. It was during this time that termination of marriage was considered and explained, and divorce was introduced. She got all her rights back and became happy in every society. The Rājapūta period saw her in her best but frequent wars made tremendous increase in the *Satīs*.

This, however, was a short-lived gain. Her degeneration started in the form of prostitution with the decline of chivalry. The alien invasions made her life pitiable. With the menfolk killed or underground, she fell easy prey to the invaders. The veil, the female circumcision and the like are the by-products of these barbarous raids. (It is not for nothing that Shakespeare's actresses (specially the young ones) are often seen attired in male clothes while passing through forests or other uninhabited areas.

Amazon Army—

Dahomey kings had never had quite rivals among African kings for vices and virtues both. The most remarkable thing about their army was that it contained a large number of professionally trained women troops called Amazons. There were 18,000 of these at one time and their fierceness and valour knew no bounds. They slaughtered and butchered the enemy mercilessly. (No wonder, their kings had palace walls made of human skulls and sleeping chambers paved with the heads of their enemies).

Elsewhere also women did not lack in courage and valour. They took to arms when need came.We had our own (queens) Lakṣmī Bāī, Ahalyābāī, Durgāwatī........They proved no less warriors than their male counterparts. Didn't Joan of Ark deliver France from all her fearful foes almost single handed? And Goddess Durgā, the gods from the invincible demons? They dared where none else could.

The charming (women) body guards employed by some heads of state are the most dreaded crackshots.

The Redemption—

The redeeming process of woman's status started in the 18th century with the rise of humanitarian thinking. The revolutionary thinkers (Rousseau, Voltaire and co.) galvanized the minds of intelligentsia. This culminated in revolutions in France, America and other countries, but didn't stop there itself. Its echoes forced the people round the globe to rack their brains. Even the chained

India could not keep away from it. Rājā Rāmamohana Roy, the doyen of reformers, brought the problems of woman to the forefront. Swāmī Vivekānanda emphasized upon education to women. Maharṣi Karve took upon himself to accomplish a part of this task. Īśvara Candra Vidyāsāgara voiced woman's desire for progress. The call of Mahātmā Gāndhī brought women out in the field to challenge the alien rule, and produced such fighters as Kastūrabā Gāndhī, Sarojinī Nāidū, Kamalā Neharū, Vijaya Lakṣmī Paṇdita, Indirā Gāndhī...... who proved their merit in making the history of the country.

Modern age has re-established the woman. She is able to shape not only the destiny of her own but also that of her country and the world. She made contributions, in all fields and produced such towering scientists as Madam Curie and her daughter, such renowned poets and writers as Emily Dickinson, Mahādevī Vermā, Amṛtā Prītama, Pearl S. Buck, Agāthā Christie, Gaurā Panta, Śivānī, Kamalā Mārkaṇḍeya, Kañcanalatā Sabbarwāla...........; such statespersons as the Prime Ministers of Srilanka, Israel, India, U. K., Canada, Pakistan, Bangla Desh and Presidents of the Philippines, Nicaragua, Srilanka.......; such humanists as Florence Nightingale; such spiritual leaders as Anne Bessent, Sister Niveditā, Pondicherry Mother, Mā Ānanda Moyee, Śraddhāmātā, Dayāmātā........

Helpless Prey to Inhumanity—

It has been amply proved time and again that reforms come from within, not without. Had law alone been enough, there would have been no crime left on earth now. Law has its own limit whereas vice knows no limit; as a result law has to run continually after vice to maim it, blunt its fangs if not eradicate it altogether; make the people see reason, and protect the innocent. Human bondage, though unseen, still keeps mankind fettered. Woman is naturally the worst sufferer. Flesh trade has acquired new dimensions with greater demands, newer and newer forms of perversion, more and more easy money,

increasing materialism and shrinking spiritual values. How ironical! people talk of disciplines, but carefully avoid talking spiritualism. They forget that the two are interlinked. You cannot achieve one by bidding farewell to the other. The root cause of indiscipline (of all hues) is the neglect of the spirit. You can discipline spirit only. You cannot discipline matter. It needs external force to do so.

Hundreds of innocent girls are imported and exported every year (of course, illegally) like commodities to satisfy the lust of their far off brethren, to keep Mrs. Worren's profession throbbing and to supply new outlets to the beleaguered, 'Morality'. What happens to them afterwards is anybody's guess.

The other difficulty is the evergreen habit of parrot talk, you talk of the blue films, playing havoc with the lives of the innocent, they will blurt out the *Kāmasūtra* and Khajuraho (even without knowing anything of them). They don't need to be reminded that the former was written by a sage, and Khajuraho idols took decades to carve out. They represent sublimation of sex, transformed into art whereas the blue films are just to exploit sex and spin money.

At home, the worst forms of incest are gaining currency. Rape has become the order of the day (with the so-called protectors being in the forefront). Foetus-testing and the resultant female infanticide has exposed our morality, humanity, liberality and downright hypocrisy. Woman is not safe even in her mother's womb. What are we heading to?

Her Own Worst Enemy—

Scriptures say—"Woman is not infatuated by woman. Such infatuation may not be natural but the opposite seems to have become natural now. Woman has become the worst enemy of her class. Who else perpetrates the bride-burning? In all such reported cases the mother-in-law is invariably the first accused, the second being the sister-in-law. (Menfolk are the poor third). They never seem to be repentant of the homicide that, too, of

their own kith and kin, who would have gladly been with them through thick and thin, would have served them sincerely suffered for them and even died for them.

Dowry originally meant gifts and presents offered affectionately. Later on it came to mean something like the girls' share in the ancestral property, paid voluntarily in cash or kind, once for all. But then the beggars became choosers, started dictating terms and with their unsatiable thirst went on asking for more and more and more. In their greed, going beyond bounds, they didn't hesitate even in killing the bride in order to get a new one with more dowry. Marriage became business; love was relegated to a much lower position of almost formality only. Flowers of humanity vanished from this loveless society, only thorns remained there (to pinch and bleed).

This created a wedge in the society. Those who didn't know dowry also started asking. The poor found no one to look to. They could hardly find a match for their daughter. Many of them remained unmarried and many girls commit suicide out of frustration. Many had to be matched very unevenly. Law remained a mute witness to all this tragedy. Its executors were often found siding with the culprit.

The Feminist—

Taking the man as her enemy, woman has, at places, risen to avenge herself. Blaming each other or beating about the bush is defeatist mentality. Love, not confrontation, is the basis of unity (and strength) and love is not love unless it loves to love. Self love is a fallacy and—

"That love is far too weak and small
Which will love some but not love all."

Man and woman have been created to live together, not to be at loggerhead. If they can't sail together, sinking down is the only alternative. Adjustment is always possible and should be tried and effected. They have to play their respective parts in the society and play them harmoniously. Woman has to retain

her virtuous identity against all odds. She should not forget that no one can remain self-centred in this age of openness and diminishing barriers. Confrontation is Western concept. It often leads to violence and destruction. We have to avoid the extremes.

Fractured Backbone—

Joint family system is the backbone of the Orient. This (backbone) has caved in under economic, political and materialistic pressure. Too much propaganda against rising population has made the people feel that children are at the root of all their miseries. This, to a great extent, has evaporated the parental love and filial piety. The unearning hands are burdensome even to those who have been fed and brought up by them. The child may feel like paying back for his upkeep in the hostel by keeping the parents in the old-age-homes, but our society believes in service not payment. One feels pleasure in his own place, among his own people, irrespective of pecuniary hardships.

The fissure mainly came because of all the able members being busy in making both ends meet, having little time left for each other or the other members of the family. Gone are the days when the whole family could sit together in the evening, exchange views and entertain the children as well as guests, let alone visiting friends and relatives. The small screen has narrowed the horizons of man. The over weight satchels have taken away the child's childhood. The woman, torn between the office and the kitchen, finds herself ever on the run. The soaring prices have left her with no choice. The vicious circle seems to be going beyond anybody. Loyalty is lacking among avowed pairs what to say of hired servants. In posh localities of the metropolis the servants have become the potential killers also (of late), their main victim being the woman again, or the old couples.

The Much Maligned Law-giver—

Manu, the law-giver, has become an object of somewhat

universal condemnation for certain of his utterances in his *magnum opus*, the *Manusmṛti* (even of those who have only heard of it). A tiny fraction has obscured the whole from the ignoramuses. They don't bother to know the truth as it involves labour, much beyond the easy chair scholars and ivory tower thinkers.

To put the matter straight, it is not Manu alone who put woman under perpetual dependence (of her father, husband and child). Don't a Japanese proverb "day and night woman must be kept in dependence by the males of her family; a woman is never fit for independence" and a Confucian thought "to be a woman is to submit,"........say the same? These are not their own views. It is how the society thought then. The thoughts have changed; consequently the rules should also change. When an ordinary constitution needs so many amendments each year, how can such an old constitution remain immune to it?

But revision doesn't mean extermination. It requires careful study and clause by clause discussion. How strange Manu got so many brickbats but no bouquets for declaring openly 'यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः' Gods abide in those homes where women are worshipped, (not merely respected), and warning the menfolk, unambiguously, of the disastrous consequences of not showing proper respect to woman (*Manusmṛti* III. 55—59).

Isn't the society faced with the same consequences for not obeying the seer?

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The mother stands by her child through everything. Wife and children may desert a man, but his mother never. Mother, again, is the impartial energy of the universe, because of the colourless love that asks not, desires not,cares not for the evil in her child, but loves him the more. And today mother-worship is the worship of all the highest classes amongst the Hindus.

—*Swami Vivekananda*

Ṛṣikās of Ṛgveda

(Female Seers of Vedic Hymns)

—*Dr. Shashi Tiwari*

Almost in every important *Vedic Saṁhitā* we find a tradition of mentioning *Ṛṣi, Devatā* and *Chanda* of every *Mantra* before the recitation of the hymns. According to the great Yāska those who visualised the *Mantras* in the condition of their trance were called *Ṛṣis*—"साक्षात्कृतधर्माण ऋषयो बभूव" (*Nirukta* I. 20). There is another definition of the word *Ṛṣi* according to which *Ṛṣis* were those who composed the *Mantra*—"यस्य वाक्यं स ऋषि:" (*Ṛksarvānukramaṇī* II. 4-5). Both the definitions define the word *Ṛṣi* as a seer or speaker of a *Mantra*. In *Ṛgveda Saṁhitā* with every *Sūkta* or *Mantra* we find a mention of the name of that particular seer or speaker. This we find in the *Sarvānukramaṇī* of Kātyāyana, *Ārṣānukramaṇī* and *Bṛhaddevatā* of Śaunaka and the commentaries of Sāyaṇa.

The *Ṛṣi Tattva* is an intricate and obscure subject to contemplate upon. It is not necessary that every seer must be a god or human being. Contrary to this we find certain *Ṛṣis* like Śraddhā, Vāk, Akṣa, Pavitra etc., eventhough they are not supposed to have a body like Viśvāmitra and others. Although it is not always easy to distinguish the female names from the male ones yet based on the probable gender of the names the male and female seers are separated from each other. So certain seers were defined to be female seers or *Ṛṣikās*.

In *Ṛgveda* women occupy a respectable place. We find certain women referred to with great admiration and respect in the context of domestic affairs, social organisations, education, warfare and spiritual debate etc. This is why we do not feel

any element of surprise when we find sufficient references of female seers like the male ones. Both had visualised the *Mantras*. The number of female seers or the speakers of the *Vedic Mantras* comes to about thirty. This number includes five lady seers of *Khila Sūkta* also. The distinctive speciality about these female seers is their appearance either in the first *Maṇḍala* or the tenth. *Mantras* composed or visualised by them appear only in these two *Maṇḍalas*.

Based on their forms and traits these *Ṛṣikās* can be categorised in three ways—

(1) All the thirty can be divided in seven groups—

(A) Related to the gods or gods themselves—Indramātaraḥ, Indrasnuṣā, Indrāṇī, Aditi, Sūryā, Sāvitrī, Yamī, Vaivasvatī, Śacī Paulomī.

(B) Pertaining to Ṛṣis and kings—Agastyasvasā, Apālā, Ātreyī, Śaśvatī Āṅgirasī, Ghoṣā, Kākṣīvatī, Juhū Brahmajāyā, Romaśā, Lopāmudrā, Viśvavārā, Ātreyī.

(C) Apsarās—Urvaśī, Śikhaṇḍinyau Kāśyapī.

(D) Creatures other than human beings—Devaśunī, Saramā, Godhā, Sārparājñī.

(E) Inanimate objects—Nadyaḥ, Rātrī, Dakṣiṇā.

(F) Abstract things—Vāk, Śraddhā.

(G) Ṛṣikās of Khila Sūkta—Śrī, Lākṣā, Medhā, Upaniṣad and Niṣad.

The Second classification—

In *Ārṣānukramaṇī* and *Bṛhaddevatā*—we find the names of twenty-seven *Ṛṣikās* of *Ṛgveda* innumerated and they are referred to as *Brahmavādinī (Brahmavādinī* were those ladies who never married and lived an ascetic life throughout). In *Bṛhaddevatā* Śaunaka has classified them in three divisions—

(A) Those who offered prayers to the different deities. They are Ghoṣā, Godhā, Viśvavārā, Apālā, Upaniṣad, Niṣad, Juhū Brahmajāyā, Agastyasvarā and Aditi.

(B) Under this category come those who have either talked

to the deities or had discussions with them and they are Indrāṇī, Indramātā, Saramā, Romaśā, Urvaśī, Lopāmudrā, Nadyah, Yamī and Śaśvatī Nārī.

(C) Under this group come those seers whose prayers are centred around Self. In other words they themselves are the *Ṛṣis* as well as *Devatās*. They are Śrī, Lākṣā, Sārparājñī, Vāk, Śraddhā, Medhā, Dakṣiṇā, Rātrī, Sūryā and Sāvitrī. This way every group contains nine names.

The Third classification—

Based on their Rishihood and its kind, they can be divided into three groups—

(A) Independent Rishihood—Indramātaraḥ, Indrasnuṣā, Viśvavārā etc.

(B) *Vaikalpika* Rishihood—Aditi Dākṣāyaṇī, Śikhaṇḍinyau, Rātrī etc.

(C) Combined Rishihood—Nadyaḥ, Indramātaraḥ etc.

The Fourth classification—

Considering Rishihood and godhood both at the same time, there can be two divisions of these *Ṛṣikās*—

(A) Among the *Mantras* of the same type—Sārparājñī, Vāk, Śraddhā, Dakṣiṇā, Rātrī etc.

(B) *Ṛṣikās* who are *Ṛṣis* of certain *Mantras* and *Devatās* in some other ones—Indrāṇī, Aditi, Yamī, Romaśā etc.

Some details about these *Ṛṣikās* are given below—

(A) *Ṛṣikās* who are either deities themselves or related to some deities (*Ṛgveda* X. 153) are related to many such female seers who are the sisters to some deities and mothers of Indra. In the first *Mantra* it is said that by means of prayers etc., they attained Indra. The *Ṛṣikās* and other goddesses who are very active and industrious, worship Indra. In *Ṛgveda* (X. 28.1) the Ṛṣikā is the wife of Vasukra the son of Indra and this way she is the daughter-in-law of Indra. In *Ṛgveda* (X. 86) the *Ṛṣikā* of eleven *Mantras* is Indrāṇī. In these eleven *Mantras* she had some conversation with Vṛṣākapi and Indra. *Ṛgveda* (VIII. 18)

and (X. 72) are related to Aditi and Aditi Dākṣāyaṇī. In the first *Sūkta* there is a dialogue between Vāmadeva and Indra on one side and Aditi Dākṣāyaṇī on the other. Here because of being the speaker of *Mantra* Aditi is *Ṛṣi*. *Ṛgveda* (X. 72) contains Bṛhaspati the son of Loka, Āṅgirasa Bṛhaspati or Aditi, the daughter of Dakṣa—these three are the alternate *Ṛṣis*. In the later period Aditi has been described as the mother of *Devas*. Possibly the Rishihood is the ground behind the relation between Aditi and the *Devas*. The *Ṛṣikā* of forty-seven *Mantras* of eighty-fifth *Sūkta* of tenth *Maṇḍala* is Sūryā Sāvitrī. In these *Mantras* there is description of Soma, the marriage of Sūryā, Aśvinau, Sūrya etc. In this *Sūkta* for the first time the *Mantras* for marriage are given and the rituals of marriage and the procedure are described. According to *Bṛhaddevatā* Sāvitrī and Sūryā are the two names of the Vivasvān's wife and the same lady is referred to as Vṛṣākapāyī in several prayers and who is known as Ambā also. The two names of Yamī and Yamī Vaivasvatī appear in the list of *Ṛṣis*. They have their connection with (*Ṛgveda* X. 154) and (X. 10). In (X. 154) Yama and the manes are remembered. Yamī is the daughter of Vivasvān and sister of Yama. In *Ṛgveda* (X. 10) there is a dialogue between Yama and Yamī, Śacī Paulomī is said to be the *Ṛṣi* of (X. 159). Eventhough the name of Śacī does not appear in the entire *Sūkta* but it is quite apparent that it is some female seer who must have spoken these *Mantras*. In these *Mantras* she has praised her own qualities.

(B) Related to Ṛṣis and the kings—Among the *Ṛṣikās* related to the *Ṛṣis* is the name of Agastyasvasā who is supposed to be a *Ṛṣi* of *Ṛgveda* (X. 6) in combination with other *Ṛṣi*. Apālā, the daughter of Atri in *Ṛgveda* (VIII. 91) has offered prayers to Indra in order to cure skin disease. Śaśvatī Āṅgirasī visualised *Ṛgveda* (VIII.1.34). Ghoṣā Kakṣīvatī has offered prayers to Aśvinau in 39th and 40th *Sūktas* of tenth *Maṇḍala* and after the delivery Aśvinau cured her, made her ageless and provided

husband to her. Juhū Brahmajāyā is a *Vaikalpika Ṛṣi* of *Ṛgveda* (X. 109). The *Brahmavādinī* Romaśā is the *Ṛṣikā* of *Ṛgveda* (I.126.7) who has expressed her original thoughts of a woman and her self-respect also. Lopāmudrā, the wife of Agastya in *Ṛgveda* (I.179) has expressed her feelings. Viśvavārā Ātreyī is the *Ṛṣikā* of *Ṛgveda* (V.28) who has composed six *Mantras* in the praise of fire-god.

(C) Apsarās—

In *Ṛgveda* (X. 95) there are eighteen *Mantras* in all containing a dialogue between Purūravā and Urvaśī. Out of these eighteen, Urvaśī is said to have composed nine *Mantras.* The *Ṛṣi* of *Ṛgveda* (IX. 104) are two daughters of Kaśyapa named Śikhaṇḍinī. Both are *Apsarās* and are considered to be *Vaikalpika Ṛṣis.*

(D) Non-human Creatures—

In *Ṛgveda* (X. 108) we find a dialogue between Saramā and Paṇi. In this *Sūkta* six *Mantras* are in the name of Saramā Devaśunī. Saramā has faithfully discharged her duties as an emissary of Indra. Godhā eventhough its meaning is not very clear, according to *Bṛhaddevatā* (VI. 106) means some creature like crocodile.* She is the *Ṛṣikā* of *Ṛgveda* (X. 134). Sārparājñī is the *Ṛṣikā* of (X. 189) although its form and nature are hazy and not clear.

(E) Inanimate objects—

In *Ṛgveda* (III. 33) the *Ṛṣikā* of four *Mantras* are rivers because these rivers addressed the *Ṛṣi* Viśvāmitra and narrated their feelings. Rātri Bhāradvājī is the *Ṛṣikā* of (X. 127) and Dakṣiṇā Prājāpatyā is the *Ṛṣi* and *Devatā* both of (X. 107). It is the same *Dakṣiṇā* which is given to *Brāhmaṇas* in sacrifices. It has been personified as the daughter of Prajāpati.

(F) Abstract things—

The *Ṛṣikā* of *Ṛgveda* (X. 125) is Vāk. She praised her

* It may possibly belong to lizard family.

ownself. Śraddhā Kāmāyanī is the *Ṛṣikā* of *Ṛgveda* (X. 151). Eventhough it is a psychic instinct yet it is personified as a *Ṛṣi*.

Now we can safely conclude that in the *Vedic* age women were not only authorised to study *Vedas* and acquire the unimaginable heights in spiritual sciences but they were composers also of *Vedic Mantras*. It is only in the later period when they were debarred alongwith the *Śūdras* from Vedic study. The reason behind this must have been only social and political.

—*Translation*

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The marriage is not meant for sensual pleasure or having a son only. If marriage is not helpful in sublimating the character, it is quite unnecessary. The senses can be kept well within the control through practice. They can be tamed and kept calm through practice. A marriage without love is useless. It is better to remain unmarried and have control over the senses even at the risk of annihilation of human race from the surface of the earth.

For the ladies marriage is the only stepping stone for a religious life. This is why a wife is called *Sahadharmiṇī* (co-religionist). Even the primal mother Durgā is the wedded wife to Lord Śiva.

—*Rishi Bankimachandra*

मृते जीवति वा पत्यौ या नान्यमुपगच्छति।
सेह कीर्तिमवाप्नोति मोदते चोमया सह॥

"Whether the husband is alive or dead, if a woman does not go to or think of any other person, she certainly does attain name and fame on this earth and after expiry she abides with the mother goddess Umā."

—*Yājñavalkya Smṛti* (I. 75)

Indian Women in Vedic Age

—Dr. Smt. Saroj Raizada

Change is a reality and fact of life. It takes place in individuals as well as in groups in society. Every living society changes with the time and the societies, which do not change, are demolished from the face of the earth. A large number of societies came into existence but vanished as soon as they refused to accept the change. What a society had been for example about five hundred years' back cannot remain the same in modern times.

The changes in society may be grouped in different ways for example, intentional and unintentional; long term and short term, slow and rapid etc. But there is something which is endorsed throughout the life of society and which gives it an identity, uniqueness and permanency, for example Indian society is Indian whether it was pre-Vedic period, Vedic period or modern period. The biological principles for human being as well as the societies are more or less similar and are aimed at the survival of the fittest on the basis of natural selection. The position, which women occupied in Indian society at the dawn of civilization, during the Vedic age was much better than later times. "Woman in Vedic age appears to have enjoyed a comparatively higher status than that enjoyed by her sisters in the post-Vedic age. She was the very centre of the domestic world and was its Empress."

In the *Ṛgveda,* there are many descriptions which throw an interesting light on the position of women in ancient India. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* gives a high place to woman by saying

that "Woman as mother is the best and foremost preceptor of children and she is not merely an object of pleasure but a colleague in the religious life of man."

Even Āpastamba, another law-giver of ancient India speaks about woman. As a child of *Kali*-age, he discards rules which allowed greater freedom to women, on the ground of their being unfit for society in his time. His rules were framed to preserve the chastity of woman.

"There is a widespread misconception regarding the true status of woman in Ancient Indian Society. It is mainly due to deplorable ignorance" as Rādhā Kamala Mukerjī writes of the original *Saṁskṛta* texts, both *Śruti* and *Smṛti,* in which are to be found the laws, customs and traditions which define the 'true status' of woman in early times.

She had an equally important share in the drama of human life as man. "Manu, however, allows a man to marry a girl even from an inferior or bad family, provided she is a jewel among women."

The position and living style of woman can be inferred from the references of *Dharma Śāstras.* As we see that Manu's highest veneration for woman is embodied in *Manu Saṁhitā,* where he says that woman should be honoured. He writes—"Where women are neglected, all rites and ceremonies are fruitless; and that family quickly perishes where women are neglected, but on the other hand where women do not grieve, it ever prospers. Houses in which dishonoured women pronounce a curse perish as if by magic." Woman is thus the instrument of prosperity, a source of joy to God; and she deserves honour from all.

He lays still more emphasis on the honouring of women by declaring that "Where women are honoured there God is pleased; but where they are not honoured no sacred rite yields any reward."

The same thoughts have been expressed by various other

writers of *Dharma Śāstras* in different forms Yājñavalkya extols woman so much so to call them embodiments of all divine virtues on earth. He says—"Soma gave them (women) purification, the Gandharva sweet speech, Agni perfect purity, therefore, verily, woman are always pure."

Similar thoughts have been exposed in the *Baudhāyana Dharmaśāstra*..........."Respect for woman is mentioned in the great epic—the *Mahābhārata* also." Women should be honoured and caressed by their father, brothers, father-in-law and brother-in-law, if they are desirous of their own welfare.

The position of a woman in a society can be judged by the way in which the birth of a girl is received. There are prayers for the birth of a son, though we do not come across any reference deprecating the birth of a daughter. So it can be presumed that the position of a girl was not very low, although it cannot be said that she was regarded as equal to a boy.

The advent of a daughter in the family was not an occasion for rejoicing, but rather for general gloom and depression. In the *Atharva Veda,* we find the general desire for the birth of a son and deploring birth of a daughter. The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* also lays down that "A daughter is a source of misery and that a son is the saviour of the family."

Dr. A. S. Altekar points out that upto 300 B. C. the women were generally looked upon with honour but thereafter this position gradually began to deteriorate. Gautama and Viṣṇu provide that, "if a girl is not betrothed or married away, she shall herself choose her husband after allowing three monthly courses to pass." So the right of selecting one's own husband reflects to some extent the freedom enjoyed by women.

In *Yogavāsiṣṭha* we find a reference to child marriage, where it is said—"Let the father marry his daughter while she still runs naked for if she stays in the house after her marriageable age, sin falls on the father."

As regards Manu, he is in favour of marrying girls at tender

age. Yama, another authority, on social matters also proceeds—"The father, who gives away in marriage his daughter, after she has attained the twelfth year, drinks her menstrual blood month-after-month.

The position of girls was not unimportant. Unmarried girls, therefore, among the persons were selected to receive Śrī Rāma on His return to Ayodhya from His long exile and to offer him the coronation. It is interesting to note that Śrī Rāma received important religious bath first at the hands of unmarried girls and then of his trusted generals and *Mantrīs*.

Further we notice that "Down to about the third century B. C. girls could remain unmarried till attaining the age of sixteen."

Upanayana rituals were also obligatory for them. This must have ensured the imparting of Vedic and literary education to all the girls belonging to *Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya* and *Vaiśya* classes. Grown up and educated girls naturally played an important role in management of their parents' home. Important duty of *Atithi Satkāra* i. e., receiving guests and looking after their comforts was usually entrusted to them.....Cultural music and dancing formed principal part in their indoor activities. Public and dramatic concerts were often organized and girls used to go out to see them alongwith their elders or lovers.

Usually ordinary girls did not go for higher education. They were imparted education within the four walls of their family by their father, uncle, brothers or womenfolk who took up teaching profession.

Besides, we have some references to girls going out to swim as well. However, it is not easy to give percentage of such girls who opted to make use of this art. Girls used to play a number of courtyard games, like 'hide and seek' and 'run and catch', which are graphically described in the *Kāmasūtra* (III. 3).

In the post-Vedic society, the position of woman deteriorated considerably. "We cannot adequately describe the whole process

of change, because the main available reference sources were not the works of one writer written at one time. But this much is obvious that the society had already experience of a change in the direction of rigidity." There are many contradictory statements found in the literature of this period. Some writers say that woman did not have any voice in the settlement of their marriage while in epics we notice the description of *Swayaṁvara* of Sītā and Draupadī. Same can be said about the suitable age of marriage.

Buddhism brought great freedom and equality for women in the sphere of religion. The birth of a girl was not regarded as a calamity, as in the post-Vedic period. Thus, Buddhism worked as a powerful democratic force against the narrow outlook of the Brahmanic culture pattern that was slowly emerging.

During Maurayan and Gupta Periods, the position of women was quite satisfactory. But the girls were not free to choose to remain unmarried for the whole life. In matter of property rights girls enjoyed certain privileges.

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पुरुषाणां सहस्त्रं च सती स्त्री हि समुद्धरेत्।
पतिः पतिव्रतानां च मुच्यते सर्वपातकात्॥
नास्ति तेषां कर्मभोगः सतीनां व्रततेजसा।
तया सार्द्धं च निष्कर्मी मोदते हरिमन्दिरे॥

"Thousands of persons a chaste lady liberates. The husband of a *Pativratā* woman gets free from all sins. He is not at all bound to enjoy or suffer the fruits of the good or evil acts due to the splendour of the vows observed by the *Satī*. Free from the shakles of his past actions he enjoys eternally alongwith his wife in the abode of Lord Viṣṇu."

—*Skandapurāṇa*

Indian Women in Vedic Age

—Miss Surashree Rana

From the very beginning Indian civilization gives much more importance to women. In the early period of Aryan civilization i. e., in Vedic period the status of women was equal to men. To know more about the status and position of the women in this period we have to go deep into the Vedic literature. After going through the *Vedas* throughly we witness mainly three features of women—(1) Women as Vedic *Ṛṣis* (2) Women as Goddesses who are invoked in Vedic hymns and (3) General women character in social life.

Women Ṛṣis—

Not only the *Ṛṣis* but also certain women *Ṛṣis* are remembered for their scholastic contributions in the field of composition of Vedic hymns. Their contribution towards the Vedic literature is really wonderful, precious and unforgettable. In the *Anukramaṇī* books of *Ṛgveda* (*Bṛhaddevatā* of 'यास्क' and *Sarvānukramaṇī* of 'कात्यायन') we find certain names of women *Ṛṣis*.

In the first chapter of fourth *Aṣṭaka,* the hymn of six *Mantras* starting with "समिद्धो अग्नि" (*Ṛgveda* V. 28.1) was seen by 'विश्ववारा' the daughter of Atri. In the sixth chapter of the eighth *Aṣṭaka* the hymn containing seven *Mantras* starting with "तेऽवदन् प्रथमा......" (*Ṛgveda* X.109.1) was seen by the women *Ṛṣis* "ब्रह्मजायाजुहु". In sixth chapter of eighth *Aṣṭaka* we find certain *Mantras* like "इन्द्रस्य दूतीरिषिता......" (*Ṛgveda* X.108. 2) and "नाहं तं वेद......" (*Ṛgveda* X. 108. 4) etc., which were seen by Saramā a divine bitch. She was of lower birth 'तिर्यग्योनि'. Not only these three but also many others like Śraddhā Kāmāyanī, Śacī, Yamī, Indrāṇī, Aditi, Apālā (*Ṛgveda* X. 91), Ātreyī, Śāśwatī,

Aṅgirasī, Lopāmudrā (*Ṛgveda* I. 179), Romaśā (*Ṛgveda* X. 85), Brahmavādinī. Ghoṣā (*Bṛhaddevatā* VII.41,48, *Ṛgveda* X. 39, 40), Urvaśī, Sūryā (*Ṛgveda* X. 85), Sāvitrī, Godhā, Sikatā Nivāvarī etc. In *Ṛgveda* the number of women *Ṛṣis* are twenty-one. Gārgī and Maitreyī were also known for their unchallengeable talent.

Goddesses in Vedic Age—

Though limited in number Vedic goddesses were given equal importance as gods. They were as powerful as the gods. The goddesses invoked in the *Vedas* were—Uṣas, Rātri, Vāk, Purandhi, Aditi, Pṛthvī, Ilą̄, Sarasvatī, Dhiṣṇā, Śraddhā, Āgneyī, Indrāṇī, Varuṇānī etc. For Vedic *Ṛṣis* both gods and goddesses behaved like human beings. They ate and drank and had feelings and emotions like ordinary people.

In about two hymns the goddess Uṣā was invoked. She was imagined as the daughter of Sky, beloved of Sūrya and occasionally regarded as his mother as she precedes the sun. She was called as the elder sister of Rātri. She was young and beautiful being born again and again. She drove away evil spirits and hated darkness. She brought her worshipper wealth and children and bestowing protection and long life—

इदमु त्यत्पुरुतमं पुरस्ताज्ज्योतिस्तमसो वयुनावदस्थात्।
नूनं दिवो दुहितरो विभातीर्गातुं कृणवन्नुषसो जनाय॥
कुवित् स देवीः सनयो नवो वा यामो बभूयादुषसो वो अद्य।
येना नवग्वे अङ्गिरे दशग्वे सप्तास्ये रेवती रेवदूष॥

(*Ṛgveda* IV. 51. 1,4)

Only in one hymn (*Ṛgveda* X. 127) Rātri was invoked as a goddess. She was regarded as the sister of Uṣā, the dawn and daughter of heaven. According to A. A. Macdonell—"She is not conceived as the dark but as the bright starlit night. Decked with all splendour she drives away the darkness. At her approach men, beasts and birds go to take rest. She protects her worshippers from the wolf and the thief guiding them to safety." For example—

ओ विप्रा अमर्त्या निवतो देव्यु द्वतः। ज्योतिषा बाधते तमः॥
नि ग्रामासो अविक्षत नि पद्वन्तो नि पक्षिणः। नि श्येनासश्चिदर्थिनः॥

(*Ṛgveda* X. 127. 2, 5)

In Vedic age rivers were not treated as ordinary natural phenomena. They were prayed as divine Goddesses. The *Nadīsūkta* (X. 75) of *Ṛgveda* may be taken as instance. A familiar *Mantra* in this hymn is—

इमं मे गङ्गे यमुने सरस्वति............। etc.

River Sarasvatī was given much more importance and invoked in two hymns (VI. 61, VII.95) and in other parts of *Ṛgveda*.

महो अर्णः सरस्वती प्र चेतयति केतुना। धियो विश्वा वि राजति॥

(*Ṛgveda* I. 3.12)

Pṛthvī was also given importance. The new king was required to seek the *Anumati* or approval of the earth by uttering the following words—

"Mother Pṛthvī, injure me not nor I Thee." The land was also invoked in *Bhūmi Sūkta* of *Atharva Veda* (XII. 1)

माता भूमिः पुत्रो अहं पृथिव्याः............।

(*Atharva Veda* XII.1.12)

सा नो भूमिर्वि सृजतां माता पुत्राय भे पयः।

(*Atharva Veda* XII.1.10)

An abstract noun Śraddhā was also invoked as a Goddess in five *Mantras*. As it was said that everything was possible through Śraddhā.

श्रद्धयाग्निः समिध्यते श्रद्धया हूयते हविः। श्रद्धां भगस्य मूर्धनि वचसा वेदयामसि॥
श्रद्धां देवा यजमाना वायुगोपा उपासते। श्रद्धां हृदय्य याकूत्या श्रद्धया विन्दते वसु॥

(*Ṛgveda* X. 151.1,4)

Like Śraddhā some other abstract deities were also invoked. They are Anumati (favour), Arumati (devotion), Sunṛta. Among these abstract deities Aditi (liberation) occupied a unique position. She was the mother of *Ādityas*. Vāk was also invoked as a goddess (*Ṛgveda* 71. 125).

In a hymn of *Ṛgveda* (X. 146). Araṇyānī (the goddess of forest) was invoked.

From the above descriptions it is proved that in Vedic age the internal power of women (नारी शक्ति) was never underestimated. They recognised it well and expressed their devotion and shown their respect to it by invoking and praying different goddesses.

Women in Social Life—

In Vedic age women had a significant position in the society as well as in the family. She had always been respected as a mother, a daughter, a sister and a wife.

Unlike today in Vedic period the birth of a girl child was not considered or regarded as a curse. It was a matter of pleasure and delight if a girl child took birth in the family. Like the sons, the girls received education in *Gurukula Āśramas.* They were taught *Lalita Kalā,* music, dance, poetics etc. The *Vedas* are the great witness of a number of learned women personnels. It is already stated earlier that there were many women *Ṛṣis* who have seen or realised different Vedic *Mantras.*

In Vedic period marriage was considered as a sacred bond, which could not be broken by any human action. In the selection of bridegroom the choice of father had a greater value.

पिता यत्र दुहितुः सेकमृञ्जन् त्सं शग्म्येन मनसा दधन्वे।

(*Ṛgveda* III. 31. 1)

But the princesses were given independence in that matter. Sometimes brideprice had been given by the bridegroom and evidences are found in support of dowry system from a dialogue hymn (*Ṛgveda* X. 85) named *Sūryā Sūkta.* From this *Sūkta* we can get a detailed picture of marriage rituals. Child marriage was unknown in this period. *Atharva Veda* proves that widows, particularly when without a child, were allowed to remarry. Many instances of unmarried girls who lived their lives as ascetics are also found. They were living with their fathers and brothers and inherited or regarded as the successors of their father's property.

अमाजूरिव पित्रोः सचा सती समानादा सदसस्त्वामिये भगम्।

(*Ṛgveda* II. 17. 7)

Yāska in his *Nirukta* (II. 5) explains the legal position of a *Putrikā* (a daughter who is the only child of the family). According to his interpretation a brotherless maiden even after her marriage can perform the funeral rites of her father. This shows not only she has the right to inherit her paternal property but also she is legally recognised as equal to a son.

Evidences (*Ṛgveda* I. 116. 10 and VIII. 19. 36) clearly state that a man could marry more than one woman. The Western views state that the marriage of a brotherless woman was impossible as her son would be the successor of his mother-in-law's property. So (*Ṛgveda* III. 31.1) states that the father of the girl who had no brother should adopt his grandson as his son.

In Rigvedic age the woman was greatly honoured in her father-in-law's house. Not only she had a respectable position in the family but had an authority over her husband, father-in-law and brother-in-law.

सम्राज्ञी श्वशुरे भव सम्राज्ञी श्वश्र्वां भव।
ननान्दरि सम्राज्ञी भव सम्राज्ञी अधि देवृषु॥

(*Ṛgveda* X. 85. 46)

What a respectable position she had—

भगमस्या वर्च आदिष्यधि वृक्षादिव स्त्रजम्।
महाबुध्न इव पर्वतो ज्योक् पितृष्वास्ताम्॥

(*Atharva Veda* I.14.1)

At the time of marriage father told his son-in-law—

एषा ते कुलपा राजन् तामु ते परि दद्मसि।
ज्योक् पितृष्वासाता आ शीर्ष्णः समोप्यात्॥

(*Atharva Veda* I.14.3)

This means this girl will be your 'कुलपा', so I am giving her to you.

She was blessed to be wise and has an authority over her husband.

अहं केतुरहं मुर्ध्वा हमुग्रा विवाचनी।
मामेदनुक्रतु पतिः सेहानाया उपाचरेत्॥

and also;

इहैव स्तं मा वि यौष्टं विश्वमायुर्व्यश्नुतम्।
क्रीडन्तौ पुत्रैर्नप्तृभिर्मोदमानौ स्वे गृहे॥

(*Ṛgveda* X. 85. 42)

again she is blessed with—"Signs of good fortune mark the bride. Come all of you and look at her. Wish her prosperity and then return unto your homes again"(*Ṛgveda* X. 85. 33). And also—"O bounteous Indra, make this bride blest in her sons and fortune"(*Ṛgveda* X. 85.45).

Wife was considered as home 'जायेदस्तम्' (*Ṛgveda* III.53.4). A man performed a sacrifice only when he was accompanied by his wife. A widower is not able to perform any sacrificial ceremonies. In the *Ṛgveda* (VIII. 31) we found the married couple (*Dampati*) who with mind in harmony press the Soma rinse and mix it with milk and offer adoration to the God. These events prove that the position of women in Vedic period was not so low as later.

The Duties of Women—

In *Atharva Veda* we find following lines where the duties of a woman (wife) are indicated—

शुद्धाः पूता योषितो यज्ञिया इमा ब्रह्मणां हस्तेषु प्रपृथक सादयामि।
यत्काम इदमभिषिञ्चामि वोहमिन्द्रो मरुत्वान्त्स ददातु तन्मे॥

(*Atharva Veda* VI. 122. 5)

इदं राष्ट्रं पिपृहि सौभगाय विश्व एनमनु मदन्तु देवाः॥

(*Ibid* VII. 35. 1)

एवा भगस्य जुष्टेयमस्तु नारी संप्रिया पत्याविराधयन्ती॥

(*Ibid* II. 36. 4)

जाया पत्ये मधुमतीं वाचं वदतु शन्तिवाम्॥

(*Ibid* III. 30. 2)

प्रजावती वीरसूर्देवृकामा स्योनेममग्निं गार्हपत्यं सपर्य॥

(*Ibid* XIV. 2. 18)

अधि द्वयोरधा उक्थ्यं वचो यतस्रुचा मिथुना या सपर्यतः।
असंयत्तो व्रते ते क्षेति पुष्यति भद्रा शक्तिर्यजमानाय सुन्वते॥

(*Ibid* XX. 25. 3)

सं वां भगासो अग्मत सं चित्तानि समु व्रता॥

(*Ibid* II. 30. 2)

In Vedic age a woman ought to be well-behaved and of good moral character. By giving birth to a good son, she was rendering her duty towards her motherland. She was devoted to her husband and was not doing anything against the will of her husband. Her chastity was most important. She was thinking of the welfare of her husband's family, and was taking part in performance of sacrificial ceremonies with her husband for the well-being of the family. There was a good understanding between a married couple. She was kind-hearted, pleasant, chaste, honest, simple, cheerful, loving, affectionate, considerate, polite, modest, keeping control over her temper or not be of ill-temper, efficient, selfless and liberal, effulgent, gentle and obliged to her elders.

These are all about the duties of the Indian women in Vedic period.

The women took make-up and wore different ornaments.

चित्तिरा उपबर्हणं चक्षुरा अभ्यञ्जनम्। द्यौर्भूमिः कोश आसीद्यदयात्सूर्या पतिम्॥

(*Atharva Veda* XIV. 1.6)

At the time of sacrificial ceremonies women dressed up themselves beautifully and ornamented with different precious ornaments.

सूर्याया भद्रमिद्वासो गाथयैति परिष्कृता॥

(*Atharva Veda* XIV. 1. 7)

They talked and debated independently.

वशिनी त्वं विदथमा वदासि॥

(*Ibid* XIV. 1. 20)

Not only in family life but also in war field the Indian women showed their ability, strength and power and proved themselves as 'सहधर्मिणी, सहकर्मिणी' and 'सहयोगिनी'.

संहोत्रं स्म पुरा नारी समनं वाव गच्छति।

(*Atharva Veda* XX. 126. 10)

इन्द्राण्येतु प्रथमाजीतामुषिता पुरः॥

(*Ibid* I. 27. 4)

The women in this period were not considered as weak persons. They could teach lessons to the wicked and cruel persons.

अवीरामिव मामयं शरारुरभि मन्यते।
उताहमस्मि वीरिणीन्द्रपत्नी मरुत्सखा विश्वस्मादिन्द्र उत्तरः॥

(*Ibid* XX. 126. 9)

In *Ṛgveda* we find two women Mudgalānī (X. 102.2) and Viśpalayā (I. 112. 10) who had shown their heroism in the war field.

In *Yajurveda* it is clearly stated that the Indian women had a prestigious place in the society.

तस्मै नमन्तां जनयः सुपत्नीर्मातेव पुत्रं बिभृताप्स्वेनत्॥

(*Yajurveda* 12. 35)

In *Ṛgveda* the goddess Ilā is described as the teacher of the human beings.

इडामकृण्वन् मनुषस्य शासनीं पितुर्यत् पुत्रो ममकस्य जायते॥

(*Ṛgveda* I. 31.11)

In *Atharva Veda* the women were the treasure-house of happiness.

सुमङ्गली प्रतरणी गृहाणां सुशेवा पत्ये श्वशुराय शंभूः।

(*Atharva Veda* XIV. 2. 26)

From the above discussions it is proved that unlike today in Vedic age the Indian women occupied a very prestigious, a remarkable position in the society.

यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः।

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Women and the Study of the Vedas

—*B. M. N. Murthy*

Sometime back there was a controversy in the press about the reported statement of the Śaṅkarācārya of Puri that women do not have a right to study the *Vedas* or recite them and that our scriptures do not approve of this. When the controversy became serious, the Swāmījī replied that he was quoted out of context and wrongly reported. It is beside the point who is correct—whether the peer or the press, but the moot point is to examine the problem in the light of what our scriptures state.

Before we study the problem, it is necessary that we first understand the meaning of the word *Veda* and the position and status accorded to women in ancient India.

The word *Veda* emanates from the root 'वित्' (*Vit*) to know. Hence *Veda* means knowledge. We call the *Vedas*, our sacred texts, as 'अपौरुषेयम्' (*Apauruṣeyam*) meaning that they are not authored by *Puruṣa* or man, man being merely an instrument of God to spread His word. The *Vedas* are also called 'अनादि' (*Anādi*)—without a beginning in terms of time. Our ancient Hindu religion has been in existence ever since the dawn of creation and no one has founded it nor anyone has written the *Vedas*. They have come down to us by word of mouth through oral transmission of knowledge from generation to generation—that is why the *Vedas* are called *Śruti* (which are heard). The *Vedas* are therefore the creation of an age anterior to our intellectual philosophies. Our great *Maharṣis* by their great penance captured these sounds of the *Vedas* from the *Ākāśa* and were able to pass them down from generation to generation

Veda – To know – Knowledge

by word of mouth. They were possessed of rare insight obtained through moral discipline, intense concentration, intellectual acumen, unflagging self-control and utter non-attachment to transitory pleasures. We know nothing about their personal lives, for it was not the person but the ideas they stood for that appealed to the ancient Hindus. That is why we call our *Ṛṣis* as 'मंत्रद्रष्टार:' (seers of the *Vaidika* hymns) and not as 'मंत्रकर्तार:' (composers of the *Vaidika* hymns).

The above meaning of the word *Veda* and its antiquity were echoed to the Western world by Swāmī Vivekānanda in his paper on Hinduism at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, U. S. A. on 19th September 1893. Among other things, the Swāmījī said—"The Hindus have received their religion through revelation, the *Vedas*. They hold that the *Vedas* are without beginning and without end. It may sound ludicrous to this audience, how a book can be without beginning or without end. But by the *Vedas* no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons at different times. Just as the law of gravitation existed before its discovery, and would exist if all humanity forgot it, so is it with the laws that govern the spiritual world. The moral, ethical and spiritual relations between soul and soul and between individual spirits and the Father of all spirits were there before their discovery and would remain even if we forgot them.

"The discoverers of these laws are called *Ṛṣis* and we honour them as perfect beings. I am glad to tell this audience that some of the very greatest of them were women."

These truths as enumerated by the *Vaidika* hymns are eternal, universal in application and stand the test of scrutiny by any human being equipped with moral purity and mental penetration. The *Vedas*, apart from imparting spiritual knowledge, also deal with such mundane matters as marriages, the various other social functions, funeral rites, running of a government, medicine, music, education etc. In fact the *Vedas* are nothing

but a fountain head of true knowledge.

A distinguishing feature of the *Vedas* is that no *Veda* says—"This is the only way or this is the only God." All of them proclaim that any good path followed with faith and loyalty will lead to the true goal. Further, while every other religion proclaims that its doctrine alone will lead to realisation, the *Vedas* alone have such breadth of vision as to say that the same truth can be realised in many ways by those pursuing diverse paths.

According to Christianity, woman is presented as produced from a dispensable rib of man. However, Hindu culture has behind it a profound philosophy, the *Vedānta*, which is the product of a penetrating scientific study of nature and man. Among the values that philosophy has placed before all humanity the most significant is the truth of the innate divinity of the human being. Men and women and all beings are divine in their essential nature. Men and women have been endowed by nature with the organic capacity to inquire into and realise this great truth. The *Upaniṣads* present man and woman as the equal halves of a divine unity, each complementing the other and incomplete without the other. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* says—

स इममेवात्मानं द्वेधापातयत् ततः पतिश्च पत्नी चाभवताम्।
तस्मात् इदं अर्धबृगलमिव स्व इति॥

"He (the divine person) divided himself into two halves; thus was the origin of husband and wife. Therefore, this (the body of man) is only like the one half of a split pea."

The very hoary culture of Hinduism looks upon all female species as forms of one Divine Mother. They have always the privilege to attain the highest spirituality and true culture by going beyond the limitations of sex. Not only did our scriptures not prevent women from studying the *Vedas*, they went several steps ahead in making women even the authorities on *Dharma*. The great *Maharṣi* Āpastamba in his *Āpastamba Sūtra*, which is accepted by the majority as an authority, says at the

end—"I have not covered all the *Dharmas* in the *Śāstras*. Many more are left. There are many which can be learnt from ladies and those belonging to the fourth caste. You may learn these from them."

This will show how incorrect the charge that Hindu women were kept down by the men is and that the Brahmins had assigned an inferior position to non-Brahmins.

Our scriptures are replete with instances to substantiate how women as equal partners made a deep study of the *Vedas* and how some of them remained as *Brahmavādinīs* (ladies who remained spinsters devoting their entire life to the study of the *Vedas* and *Ādhyātmika* pursuits). It was a practice in ancient days to have the *Upanayana Saṁskāra* done even for ladies, as borne out by the *Yama Smṛti*—

पुरा कल्पेतु नारीणां मौंजीबंधनमिष्यते।
अध्यापनं च वेदानां सावित्रीवाचनं तथा॥

"In ancient days, it was a practice to conduct *Upanayana* even for ladies and then enable them to study the *Vedas* and recite the *Sāvitrī*."

The *Ṛgveda* vide (X. 84—86) mentions the names of ladies like Indrāṇī, Lopāmudrā, Yamī etc., who were *Brahmavādinīs*. The *Yajurveda* vide (14. 2) blesses a newly married girl to drink the nectar of the *Vedas* and lead a virtuous life. The *Atharva Veda* vide (11.6.18) mentions about girls who got good husbands after practising *Brahmacarya*. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* vide (IV. 5. 14) mentions about Maitreyī, wife of the sage Yājñavalkya and Gārgī as two great *Brahmavādinīs* of the time. The *Śānti Parva* of *Mahābhārata* mentions about a *Kṣatriya* woman by name Sulabhā in the court of king Janaka and that she was a well-known *Brahmavādinī*. In the *Śaṅkara Digvijayam* we read about Ubhaya Bhāratī, wife of Maṇḍana Miśra who acts as an umpire in the famous philosophical debate between Ādi Śaṅkara and Maṇḍana Miśra.

The above are only a few illustrative examples from our

scriptures to prove the inherent and inborn right of women to study the *Vedas*. When several of them were even authorities on our *Dharma*, where does the question of their not having a right to study the *Vedas* arise?

Notwithstanding all the above evidences, a controversy did arise way back in 1946 in the Banaras Hindu Society when a girl by name Kalyāṇī was refused admission to study the *Vedas* on the objection that she was a girl. Paṇḍita Madana Mohana Mālavīya, the Vice-Chancellor, constituted a committee of experts to study the problem in depth and advise. The commitee, after a great deal of deliberations and thought, gave its recommendation in August 1946 upholding the right of the girl to study the *Vedas*. The girl was thereafter admitted and the decision was hailed all over the country.

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A widow should not observe the vow when Viṣṇu's day occurs. The unfortunate one again becomes a widow existence after existence. She who eats fish and flesh, goes to hell (i.e., lives in hell) for a long time, due to the wrong performance of the vows, and certainly becomes a bitch. That wicked widow, who cohabits (with a man) is the destroyer of the family, and having suffered (i.e., lived) in hells, she becomes (i.e., is born) as a female vulture for ten births. Then becoming (i.e., being born as) a female jackal she would be born as a human being.

Similarly she who becomes a widow in her childhood becomes a maid (if she errs in the performance of vows).

—*Padma Purāṇa; Sṛṣṭi Khaṇḍa* (52. 79b—83a)

The reputation of a woman is as a crystal mirror, shining and bright, but liable to be sullied by every breath that comes near it.

—*Cervantes*

Indian Women in Vedic Age

—Pratul Chandra Chaudhuri

Let us recall the happy faces of our great great grandmothers of the Vedic Age by giving a short description of marriage of Sūryā the daughter of the Sun. The ceremony took place in the bride's house. When the decorated bride, accompanied by her girl friends, came to the marriage *Paṇḍāla*, the bridegroom took her hand and said—"I take thy hand in mine for happy future that thou mayst reach old age with me—thy husband. Gods have given thee to be the mistress of my household."

After the ritual the bride came to the bridegroom's house. There the friends and relatives of her husband welcomed her by saying—"Happy be thou and prosper with thy children here, be vigilant to rule thy household in this home. Closely unite thy body with this man, thy husband. So shall ye, full of years, address your company." Guests were told—"Signs of good fortune mark the bride; come all of you and look at her. Wish her prosperity, and then return unto your homes." When the guests left the place, the bride was addressed—"Be ye not parted, dwell ye here; reach the full time of human life, with sons and grandsons sport and play, rejoicing in your own abode." Then addressing the wife the husband said—"May Prajāpati bring children forth to us, may Aryaman adorn us till old age come nigh. Not inauspicious enter thee or thy husband's house; bring blessings to our bipeds and our quadrupeds. Over thy husband's father and thy husband's mother bear full sway. Over the sister of thy husband, over his brothers rule supreme."

Then the husband prays to Indra—"O bounteous Indra, make this bride blest in her sons and fortunate, vouchsafe to her ten sons and make her husband the eleventh man."After this the husband and the wife offered this joint prayer, before the ritual came to an end—"So may the universal gods, so may the waters join our hearts. May Mātariśvan, Dhātā and Daṣṭri together bind us close."

This hymn is the earliest testimony of man considering marriage as a sacrament. It also shows that a married woman was a partner of her husband in his religious as well as domestic activities. *Dampati* was a word used for the husband and wife jointly. It actually meant that they were the joint owners of the house. Not only that, the wife was given all the religious sacraments like her husband and religious sacrifices were jointly offered by both. In *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (V. 2.1. 8) the husband calls his wife to accompany him to heaven. The wife had her own hut in the sacrificial compound. She used to make the first brick for the sacrificial altar and participate in the consecration of fire and the offering of oblations. In case of husband being absent the wife alone could offer such sacrifices.

But as in modern times, so also in the Vedic age some unpleasant customs were in vogue, side by side with this high ideal of married life. Sometimes domestic happiness was disturbed by the existence of polygamy and in very rare cases the existence of polyandry was not improbable. *Niyoga* was practised as in many other contemporary societies. Widow marriage was allowed and there were many life-long spinsters who could have claim to their paternal property.

Women cheerfully accepted the responsibility of rearing a large family. Some of them were found to be manufacturing bows and arrows, making baskets, weaving cloth and taking part in outdoor agricultural work. The names of at least two women Vadhrimatī and Vispalā may be mentioned as participating in actual fighting in the battlefield (*Ṛgveda* X. 29. 40).

Mudgalānī, wife of Mudgala drove her husband's chariot in the battlefield and chased his enemies out.

The progress or culture of a nation or race or civilization can be measured by the aims and ideals, methods and systems, achievements and perfection of the education of its women. It is a matter of pride and pleasure that unlike women of all contemporary societies, the Indian women of the Vedic Age never suffered from any disability or disadvantage imposed by the society upon them against their all-round educational development.

The women's education in India at that period was not something different from the general system in vogue. The education system of ancient India was unique in the contemporary world. Our forefathers felt that this life, without any reference to the infinite existence, knowledge and bliss surrounding it, is nothing but an 'Idiot's tale'. So they recognised the ultimate goal of life to be Self realization.

Hence if education was to be the preparation for life, it ought to be both for mundane life and the life eternal. So the great *Ṛṣi* Aṅgiras said to Śaunaka, the great householder—"Two kinds of knowledge must be known that is what the knowers of *Brahma* tell us. They are the *Parā Vidyā* (Higher knowledge) and the *Aparā Vidyā* (Lower knowledge)."

In modern terminology whatever education will fulfil the needs of our economic, social, cultural, and political development etc., may be called *Aparā Vidyā* and whatever discipline may help us in the path of Self-realisation is *Parā Vidyā*.

If such be the high ideal of education, the student had to conduct his life in tune with it. So he had to live for several years in *Guru Gṛha* as a *Brahmacārī*, in order that he might live as a constant companion of his *Guru* and took part in all the activities of the *Āśrama* life—physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual. Before he was admitted to the *Guru Gṛha*, he had to be initiated to the sacred ceremony of *Upanayana*. He

had to undergo the training in *Guru Gṛha* for several years and then he might come back to the domestic life after *Samāvartana* ceremony.

Now the question is—"Did the girls also have to pass through this life of *Brahmacaryyā*? In the *Atharva Veda* (XI. 5. 8.) it is said—''ब्रह्मचर्येण कन्या युवानं विन्दते पतिम्'' (by observing *Brahmacarya* a maiden wins a youngman as husband). In *Āśvalāyana Gṛhya Sūtra* (III. 8. 11) it is said that after the ceremony of *Samāvartana*, that is completion of studies by passing through the life of *Brahmacarya*, a *Brāhmaṇa*, a *Kṣatriya*, a *Vaiśya*, a woman should apply a particular ointment to indicated parts of their bodies. In Bāṇabhaṭṭa's *Kādambarī* (of a much later period) Mahāśvetā is described as one whose body has been rendered pure by the wearing of *Brahma Sūtra*. In *Āśvalāyana Gṛhya Sūtra* (I. 15. 4) it has been explicitly shown that girls also were initiated to the *Upanayana* ceremony. In Vedic literature numerous instances can be found that women were given the right to utter sacred *Mantras*: All these evidences prove that girls like boys had to pass through the state of *Brahmacarya* in their educational process.

Although the highest level of culture associated with the system of education described above, could be reached only by a small section of womanhood of the Vedic Age, still it cannot be denied that the great system produced a rich harvest. This is evidenced from the long list of *Brahmavādinīs*, such as, Ghoṣā, Apālā, Viśvavārā, and numerous others including Gārgī, Maitreyī and Vāk. This article ends by giving a brief account of the last three *Brahmavādinīs*, who had been known to almost all educated Indians throughout the ages—

Gārgī—

Janaka, emperor of *Videha* performed a sacrifice in which gifts were freely distributed, Brahmin scholars from Kuru and Pañcāla were assembled there. Emperor Janaka said to them—"Venerable Brahmins, let him among you, who is the best

Vedic scholar, drive these cows, home." None of the Brahmins dared. Then Yājñavalkya said to one of his pupils—"Dear Samaśrava, drive those cows home." He drove them away. The Brahmins were furious and said—"How does he dare to call himself the best Vedic scholar among us." Yājñavalkya replied—"I bow to the best Vedic scholar, but I just wish to have these cows." Therefore great scholars like Aśvala, Ārtabhaga, Bhujyu, Uṣasta, Kohala, Gārgī and Uddālaka asked him many questions about Vedic scriptural truth, but Yājñavalkya answered all of them and defeated them. After this Gārgī, the daughter of Vacaknu, asked the permission of the Brahmins saying—Venerable Brahmins, I shall ask him two questions. If he answers me these, then none of you can defeat him in discussing *Brahma*." The Brahmins said—"Ask, O Gārgī." Gārgī was satisfied by Yājñavalkya's answers. So he certainly was the best Vedic scholar. Here, the point to be noted is that no body questioned the propriety of a lady taking a leading part in such an assembly of scholars and all of them excepting one accepted her Verdict (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, part III, chapters I—VIII).

Maitreyī—

In the fourth chapter of the second part of the same *Upaniṣad*, it is stated that Yājñavalkya was going to give up his householder's life to embrace the life of renunciation and so wanted to make a final settlement of his property between his two wives—Maitreyī and Kātyāyanī. Thereupon Maitreyī said—"Venerable Sir, if indeed the whole earth, full of wealth, belonged to me, would I be immortal through that?" 'No' replied Yājñavalkya,"Your life would be just like that of people who have plenty, of immortality, however, there is no hope through wealth." Then Maitreyī said—"What should I do with that which would not make me immortal? Tell me venerable Sir, of that alone which you know to be the only means of immortality." At this query Yājñavalkya became very happy and taught her the way to Self-realization

Vāk—

Vāk was the daughter of the *Ṛṣi* Ambhṛṇa. The hymn ascribed to her is the 125th *Sūkta* of the 10th *Maṇḍala* of *Ṛgveda*. Let us quote two *Ṛks* of this *Sūkta* where the female *Ṛṣi* Vāk says—

अहं रुद्रेभिर्वसुभिश्चराम्यहमादित्यैरुत विश्वदेवैः।
अहं मित्रावरुणोभा बिभर्म्यहमिन्द्राग्नी अहमश्विनोभा॥१॥

I walk with the *Rudras* and *Vasus*,
I with *Ādityas* and all the gods;
I bear up the two—Mitra and Varuṇa
I, Indra and Agni, the two *Aśvins*.

अहमेव स्वयमिदं वदामि जुष्टं देवेभिरुत मानुषेभिः।
यं कामये तं तमुग्रं कृणोमि तं ब्रह्माणं तमृषिं तं सुमेधाम्॥5॥

I am teaching the truth of *Brahma*
Which *Devas* and men aspire to;
I make one the greatest and another
A *Ṛṣi* or the wisest; if I so desire.

Do not these verses seem to be the impassioned utterance of the same *Advaita* realisation as was expressed by Śrī Śaṅkarācārya in the following verse several centuries later—"I have no father nor have I mother nor birth, I have no friend, nor have I any *Guru* nor disciple, I am knowledge and bliss absolute, I am Śiva, I am Śiva."

Such were our great great grandmothers of the Vedic Age. May they bless us, so that we, of the modern age, can carry this bliss of knowledge to every corner of the world and free ourselves from the bondage of egoism.

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She is not made to be the admiration of everybody but the happiness of one.

—***Burke***

Woman should not be the admiration of every body but the happiness of one

Sarasvatī

(The Goddess of Learning)

—*Rama Chandra Mishra*

Since the pre-historic times men propitiated natural phenomenon for protection from the ravages of nature. Among those which held the power and sway over him were wind, fire, sun, water and lightning etcetra. They did not understand their physical properties and they were beyond their realms. They had the power to benefit or harm them and their lives. As a result they praised and supplicated Marut, Agni, Sūrya, Varuṇa and Vidyut for their own and the communities' benefits and protection from harm. Later these prayers were rhythmatised in verse form in the *Vedas*. Thus prayers in musical form were born. Much later, lyrically composed verses were sung praising *Dyau* (sky), *Pṛthvī* (earth), *Uṣas* (dawn), *Sandhyā* (evening), who were natural phenomena but were not powerful enough to bring benefit or harm to mankind. It was probably near about that time hymns were composed in the service of Sarasvatī.

Sarasvatī is first mentioned in *Ṛgveda* as 'like water' (उदकवत्). The most prominent and important characteristic of Sarasvatī as mentioned in *Ṛgveda* is that of a large mass of water described as mighty and powerful (महती). *Ṛgveda* (VI. 61. 2, 8) proceeds to illustrate how her mighty and powerful waves break-down hills, mountains and large rocks. Her flood waters are depicted as swift and roaring. She is delineated as the greatest among the great masses of water. Ever-active and perennially inexhaustible, She is said to be born from the celestial ocean (*Ṛgveda* VII. 95. 1-2). The *Vedas* apparently did not intend to limit the scope of Sarasvatī to a mere stream or river, but

described Her as a Heaven-born source of life-giving water, which pervades the three worlds of the earth 'भूः', atmosphere 'भुवः' and the celestial region 'स्वः' (*Ṛgveda* VI. 61. 11-12). Sarasvatī's very presence purifies and her waters cleanse poison from the human system (*Ṛgveda* VI. 61. 3). Sarasvatī is described as the one who gives fertility to the earth.

Men petition Her for charming personality, physical strength, children and immortality. She is bountiful 'सुभगा.' and bestows fortune, inspiration, eloquence and learning on Her devotees. She is the source of sonorous music, gracious and beautious thoughts and picturesque piety (*Ṛgveda* I. 3. 10—12).

The transition from *Vedas* to *Brāhmaṇas* qualitatively altered the very nature of Sarasvatī. She began to be identified with speech 'वाक्' Though She continued to be identified with water, the stress changed; from a mere mass of water, She became identified with the instrument of mass communication.

The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (XIV. 2. 1. 12) declares that Sarasvatī is *Vāk* Herself. The *Kauṣītakī Brāhmaṇa* repeatedly announces that *Vāk* is none but Sarasvatī (V. 1, X. 6, XII. 2 and XIV. 5) not only that, but another important *Brāhmaṇa Aitereya* also confirms (6-7) the same idea.

A line of thought in *Vedas* propagates the view that the creation was created originally from sound. 'नाद' or sound is considered to be the primordial stuff from which creation originated. It was first 'अनाहत', the unmanifested unstrung. Then it was *Brahma* 'ब्रह्म'. But gradually it changed and became manifest, it could be heard, and it became 'शब्द'—audible sound. The transition from *Nāda* to *Vāk* was a natural corrollary. It just needed time. First it was thought (भाव), then it was sound (नाद) and then it was speech (वाक्). *Vāk* or speech is a creative element of the cosmic ritual order. The mysterious miracle of speech found expression in the post-Vedic age as Sarasvatī. She is truth. She inspires the seers. She personifies the exhilarating *Soma* 'सोम', the drink of vision and immortality. She

is the mysterious presence that enables a brahmin to hear, visualise, experience, memorise and then to express in words the true nature of things.

Sarasvatī's identification was slowly metamorphised from 'a large mass of water' to 'a sacred river' and from thence to 'speech'. The evolution is very much a logical process. Water is absolutely essential for every living being to continue the process of living. Indeed in *Saṁskṛta* language a synonym for 'water' is 'जीवन' or in other words 'Life'. A perrenial source of fresh water is nothing but water. A stream or a mighty river is the only source of fresh water. Along the banks of the rivers were located hermitages and grew up villages, towns and large cities, which were the sources of thought, speech and action. Thus the conversion of Sarasvatī from 'a large mass of water' to Vāgdevī (वाग्देवी) is not accidental but logical, methodical and reasonable as well.

By the time *Brāhmaṇas* gave place to *Purāṇas*, Sarasvatī had become a full fledged Goddess. She is called Brāhmī, Bhāratī, Bhāṣā, Gīr, Vāk, Vāṇī (as per *Amara Koṣa*), Irā, Śāradā Girā, Girāmdevī, Gīrdevī, Īśvarī, Vācā, Vācasmitā, Vāgdevī, Varṇamātṛkā (as per *Śabda Ratnāvalī*), Gowḥ, Śvi (as per Jaṭādhara), Vākyeśvarī, Antyasandhyeśvarī and Sāyaṁ Sandhyā Devī (as per *Kavi-Kalpalatā*).

Sarasvatī came into existence from the left flank of Dharma. She was like a second Lakṣmī (द्वितीया कमलालया). She was,

एका देवी शुक्लवर्णा वीणापुस्तकधारिणी।
कोटि पूर्णेन्दुशोभाढ्या शरत्पङ्कजलोचना॥
वह्निशुद्धांशुकाधाना रत्नाभरणभूषिता।
.... सस्मिता सुन्दरीणाञ्च सुन्दरी॥

(*Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇa, Brāhma Khaṇḍa* V. 52-53)

"She was alone, white in complexion and holding in her hands a lute and a book. She was beautiful like ten millions of full moons all shining at the same time. Her eyes were like the lotus flower during the autumn season. Her robes were of

the purity and transparency of fire itself. Her ornaments were studded with different gems. A hint of a smile was hovering on her lips. The rows of small, well-formed teeth were behind those smiling lips. She was a beauty among the beautiful ladies."

Her association with Viṣṇu makes her to be His consort alongwith Śrī Lakṣmī. While Śrī Lakṣmī represents worldly well being Sarasvatī represents spiritual values. Śrī Lakṣmī is worshipped for wealth, power and progeny. But Sarasvatī is worshipped for literary achievements, artistic excellence and spiritual ascendancy. Some *Purāṇas* depict that being co-consorts, Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī do not get along well. This might be more of an imagination of the poets who always consider themselves to be economically not as well off as they would like to be. This also suggests an inherent discordance between material enjoyment (भुक्ति) and spiritual liberation (मुक्ति).

Sarasvatī is in the form of the power of intellect (बुद्धिस्वरूपिणी), bestower of the faculty of imagination (कल्पना प्रदायिनी) and the very nature of talent (प्रतिभा स्वरूपिणी). Sarasvatī is associated with Science, Art, Literature, Culture, Learning and Knowledge. She is the Source of Knowledge (वेदगर्भा), the Nature of all learning (सर्वविद्यास्वरूपिणी), Dweller in all Arts and Sciences (सर्वशास्त्रवासिनी), Causative Form of all the books (ग्रंथकारिणी), Mother of the Universe (जगन्माता) and the very Form of Creation (विश्वरूपा).

Another of the more common forms of depiction of Sarasvatī is with four hands, holding in each a lute, a book, a rosary and a pot full of Ambrosia. The book represents learning in general including science, philosophy, literature and arts. The lute represents performing Arts including dance, drama, music and painting. The rosary represents meditation, spiritual fulfilment and religious rites. The pot full of Ambrosia represents success, achievement and fulfilment as well as final Liberation.

The predominant themes in Sarasvatī's form and appearance are purity, transparence and transcendence. She is pure, transparent and white like a garland of beads of snow drops (तुषारहार धवला).

She is fresh and white like the miniscule 'कुन्द' flowers which start to bloom after sunset. Her apparel is white (श्वेतवसना). The whiteness represents Her *Sāttvika* (सात्त्विक) quality, Her purity, Her transparency and her transcendence. Her mount is the snow-white, the epitome of grace, beauty and purity Swan (हंसवाहना). She is seated on a white full-blown flower of lotus (श्वेतपद्मासना), which itself being born out of mud disseminates sweet fragrance and proclaims transcendence and purity. Material worldly imperfections and lust for power and pelf represent the mud from which rises the seat of Sarasvatī.

Sarasvatī is generally invoked and worshipped on the day on which the spring season (वसन्त ऋतु) descends upon the earth, when nature is joyful, the sky is clear, the waters in the rivers, ponds and tanks are clear like crystals of dew drops and the granaries are full fresh from the rich harvest. The cuckoos sing their melodies from mango trees laden with scented flowers to welcome Sarasvatī. On such a sweet *Vasanta Pañcamī* day people worship Her with the following *Gāyatrī Mantra*—

ॐ कामदेवाय विद्महे पुष्पबाणाय धीमहि। तन्नोऽनङ्गः प्रचोदयात्॥

The *Tāntrikas* meditate on the form of Sarasvatī by repeating a million times the following *Mantra*, by observing strict celebacy to achieve total and complete success.

ॐ ऐं वाग्देव्यै च विद्महे कामराजाय धीमहि। तन्नो देवी प्रचोदयात्॥

The *Ṛṣi* of the *Mantra* is *Kaṇva,* the metre is *Virāṭ* and the *Devatā* is *Vagvādinī*. This meditation is done for the fulfilment of all the desires of the meditator.

In *Tantra*, Sarasvatī is worshipped in many other forms like—'वागीश्वरी, कुलना, अन्तरिक्ष सरस्वती, नीला' etc.

शब्दब्रह्म यदेकं यच्चैतन्यं च सर्वभूतानाम्।
यत्परिणामस्त्रिभुवनमखिलमिदं जयति सा वाणी॥

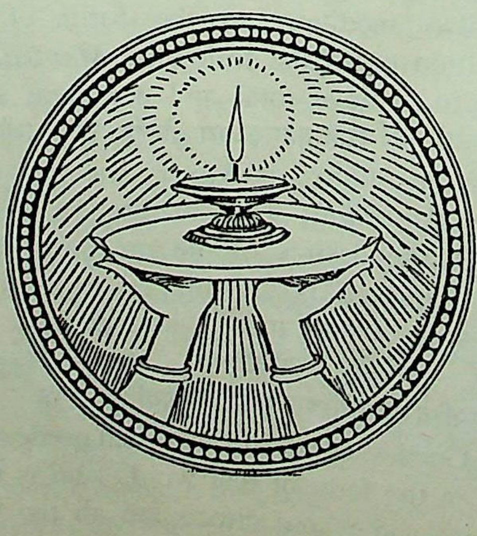
"Hail to the Goddess Sarasvatī who is said peerless '*Śabdabrahma*' or eternal self in the form of real word, who is the spirit of all the living beings and whose effects are all the three worlds."

Woman Number

—*Sadhvi Sri Kamlesh Kumari*

What shall I call you ? Just 'woman'? No ! *Śakti* !
Or else, the 'Mother Form' of the great creator,
Made to nurse the offspring of the entire universe,
And give birth to countless sons and daughters,
Nourishing them lovingly for nine months with your strength.

None can deny, you are mother Divine Herself in this form,
Uplifting the entire burden of the world's human race.
Mātā! Can anyone see the light of day without you?
Be born on this planet without your maternal grace?
Every soul gets its human form from you alone.
Really, you are the creatrix of this world—*Māyā* Herself !



Sītā Devī—A Model for Indian Womanhood

—D. Shankar Narayan

During the early stages of *Sṛṣṭi*, Brahmā had a problem of creation not progressing as fast as he had desired. Suddenly his body split into two—Manu, the man and Śatarūpā, the woman. Brahmā ordained that all further creation would be through the twin forms of his own self and so it has been right to this day. Basically, from the *Ātma-Tattva* point of view also, the *Śuddha Caitanya* in man and woman is just the same, the difference in the *Upādhis* being the result of the net *Karma* of the previous existence. Fundamentally woman has the same potential as man and this should always be kept in mind.

Mahāviṣṇu allotted his chest as the residence for Mahā-Lakṣmī where she shines blessing the Lord's devotees through her gracious *Kaṭākṣa*. Maheśvara excelled in the trinity by giving half his body to Devī and shines as *Ardha Nārīśvara*. The Lord also carries Gaṅgā Devī on his head. The Gods set an example to humanity that women should be kept happy and wherever this is done they shower their blessings.

Can we imagine any creation without a mother? The entire universe can be seen as a combination of *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*, and the ultimate goal of all whether man or woman should be to realise this truth and the differentiation between the two to attain liberation.

Woman is not just a co-traveller or friend alone of man, but an aspect of mother guiding and helping him to achieve the Supreme objective of God-realization.

Sītā Devī's glory par-excellence—

When Śrī Rāma was starting for the forest, he suggested to Sītā to stay in the palace serving his parents. Sītā reminded him that she was his *Sahadharmiṇī* (partner to observe *Dharma*) and that without him even heaven had no meaning for her. Most important of all, she should be instrumental to him in fulfilling the objective of his *Avatāra* "भवेयं कार्यसाधिनी". The divine plan of Rāvaṇa carrying away *Māyā-Sītā* and his becoming an offender against Śrī Rāma was executed. This coupled with atrocities of Rāvaṇa on *Sādhus* and society provided valid reasons for Rāma killing him.

Sītā was chastity personified. She represents the most basic values of *Dharma* and sacrifice/service synonymous with Indian womanhood. The outstanding qualities of courage, *Tapas,* self-restraint, wisdom supreme, single-minded devotion and determination not to mention kindness exhibited by Sītā, even under the most adverse circumstances in Sri Lanka are worthy of note and emulation by all humanity—not just women alone but men also. It will be relevant to remember that if Sītā represented chastity Śrī Rāma in no less a measure practised *Eka Patnī Vrata* (one wife principle). Together they showed the *Dhārmika* way of life for man and woman.

Single-minded devotion and determination—

Śrī Rāma *Bhakti* was the sound foundation on which all thoughts and actions of Sītā and Hanumān were based. They have shown humanity that unflinching devotion to Śrī Rāma is the way for a divine life of Supreme satisfaction and realization.

Looking at Sītā in the Aśoka grove Hanumān said to himself—"Sītā is neither seeing the trees nor the *Rākṣasīs* around, with single-minded devotion and concentration she is seeing Rāma alone." The *Tejas* of *Brahmacarya* that Hanumān was, could recognize the *Tejas* of *Pātivratya* that Sītā was, although her body and cloth were covered with dust and dirt.

Hanumān thought "Even the sovereignty of the three worlds

will not equal even a fraction of Sītā's glory." Earlier Hanumān had seen Rāma severely distressed at the separation from Sītā and wondered whether he could not have maintained more equanimity in joy and sorrow. After seeing Sītā in person, Hanumān's respect for Rāma reached new heights, as he felt that Rāma was doing the most impossible thing in keeping himself alive even after separation from such a Sītā.

Sītā tells *Rākṣasīs*—"Whether without kingdom or even in a pitiable condition, my husband is my *Guru*. I am attached to Rāma even as Suvarcalā is to the sungod, Śacī to Indra, Arundhatī to Vasiṣṭha, Rohiṇī to Śaśi, Lopāmudrā to Agastya, Sukanyā to Cyavana, Sāvitrī to Satyavān, Śrīmatī to Kapila, Madayantī to Sowdāsa, Damayantī to Nala and Keśinī to Sagara." The very remembrance of these *Pativratās* will confer all blessings on humanity.

Courage and wisdom, Tapas/Self Restraint—

Sītā has the courage to tell Rāvaṇa—Your *Mana* (mind) set on me should be inverted in my case. (The word becomes '*Nama*' asking him to do *Namaskāra*)—You cannot lure me with your offer of riches, position etc.

Remember I am Lakṣmī, the Goddess of prosperity—I can burn you to ashes with my power of chastity, but I restrain myself as I am observing *Tapas*. Further the *Yaśas* or fame resultant on your destruction should rightfully be Rāma's and I shall not deprive him of the same....Don't boast about your prowess after having come to carry me away ensuring Rāma's absence. Even as a dog cannot stand within smelling distance of a tiger you are unfit to be even a servant of Rāma.

Sītā enquires of Hanumān—

The courage which Rāma exhibited while giving up the kingdom and while starting for the forest, does he keep up the same courage in my separation? Does he plan the future course of action calmly?

When Hanumān offers to carry Sītā on his shoulders to

Rāma, Sītā exhibits profound wisdom in analysing the situation in totality. She advises the most intelligent Hanumān—"If the demons come to fight you, the pressure on you will be two-fold to fight and protect me too. In warfare one can never be completely sure about the result. If the demons succeed in separating me from your protection and keep me in an unknown place will it not lead to more problems? As a *Pativratā* I do not voluntarily like to touch anyone else.

Kindness—

At a later stage in the *Rāmāyaṇa* when Hanumān discusses some punishment for the *Rākṣasīs* for having harassed her; kindness personified that mother Sītā was, reminds Mārutī that after all they were hired servants and shows the world that absence of revenge is the way for the *Tapasvin*.

General—

In *Sundara Kāṇḍa* the heart of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the two towering personalities Sītā and Hanumān project the glory of *Rāma Bhakti*. At a crucial moment, when Sītā decides on suicide, Hanumān after careful thought diverts Sītā's mind by *Rāma Kathā Kathanam* (recital of Rāma's story). The *Śravaṇam* removes Sītā's sorrow, wards off the danger and on seeing the Rāma's signet ring she becomes happy as if she had attained Rāma. For the world tormented by the '*Tāpatrayam*' *Rāma Nāma* and *Rāma Kathā* offer refuge and complete protection. Hanumān removes Rāma's mental agony by giving the *Cūḍāmaṇi*. A happy Rāma feels as if he had seen Sītā, Daśaratha and Janaka and embraces Hanumān, a rarest blessing, most deservedly conferred on the latter.

May, God Rāma and Sītā—*Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*, bless us all.

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Pātivratya Dharma—the Sacred Dharma of Women

—*R. Narasimhan*

Our country is sacred and great men and women were born here only. Śrī Rāma and Śrī Kṛṣṇa took *Avatāra* in this sacred land. Great *Ācārya* like Śrī Ādi Śaṅkara, Śrī Bhagavat Rāmānuja and Śrī Madhva preached spiritualism according to their thinking and kindled the spiritual light in human beings. Women, like men, also set example to the mankind to follow the true code of conduct and by remembering their very names as in the following verses that are repeated by us daily, one gets redeemed.

अहल्या द्रौपदी तारा सीता* मन्दोदरी तथा।
पञ्चकन्याः स्मरेन्नित्यं महापातकनाशनम्॥
गायत्रीं तुलसीं गङ्गां कामधेनुमरुन्धतीम्।
पञ्चमातॄन् स्मरेन्नित्यं महापातकनाशनम्॥

The very life of the above noble women of India, depicts the way to observe chastity (पातिव्रत्य). Ahalyā was given in marriage to Gautama and when her chastity was put to test in the form of Indra, she was cursed by Gautama and only by the touch of the dust of Śrī Rāma's lotus-feet she became purified and got reunited with Gautama. Draupadī married five great warriors—the *Pāṇḍavas* and was sincere and faithful to each of them. On account of her vow and swearing, the great epic *Mahābhārata* develops into a great story containing morals and guidance for human life. The monkey queen Tārā was faithful to king Vāli and declares 'स्त्रीधर्म' in the following verse—

पतिहीना तु या नारी कामं भवतु पुत्रिणी।
धनधान्यसमृद्धापि विधवेत्युच्यते बुधैः॥

(*Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* IV. 23. 12-13)

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*In many parts of the country Sītā is substituted by Kuntī.

Sītā is an ideal woman who is an embodiment of 'पातिव्रत्य' She advises Rāvaṇa thus—

शक्या लोभयितुं नाहमैश्वर्येण धनेन वा।
अनन्या राघवेणाहं भास्करेण यथा प्रभा॥

(*Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* V. 21. 15)

She lists out the great women of our sacred land who have become great and ever remembered on account of their 'पातिव्रत्य धर्म'

दीनो वा राज्यहीनो वा यो मे भर्ता स मे गुरुः।
यथा शची महाभागा शक्रं समुपतिष्ठति।
अरुन्धती वसिष्ठं च रोहिणी शशिनं यथा॥
लोपामुद्रा यथागस्त्यं सुकन्या च्यवनं यथा।
सावित्री सत्यवन्तं च कपिलं श्रीमती यथा॥
सौदासं मदयन्तीव केशिनी सगरं यथा।
नैषधं दमयन्तीव भैमी पतिमनुव्रता॥
तथाहमिक्ष्वाकुवरं रामं पतिमनुव्रता।

(*Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* V. 24. 9—13)

To women, their husbands are everything and form the real ornament to ladies—

भर्ता नाम परं नार्याः शोभनं भूषणादपि।
एषा हि रहिता तेन शोभनार्हा न शोभते॥

(*Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* V. 16. 26)

Sītā also declares how 'पातिव्रत्य' *Dharma* is to be observed—

भर्तुर्भाग्यं तु नार्येका प्राप्नोति पुरुषर्षभ।
इह प्रेत्य च नारीणां पतिरेको गतिः सदा॥

(*Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* II. 27. 5-6)

स्त्रीणां पवित्रं परमं पतिरेको विशिष्यते॥

(*Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* II. 39. 24)

मितं ददाति हि पिता मितं भ्राता मितं सुतः।
अमितस्य तु दातारं भर्तारं का न पूजयेत्॥

(*Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* II. 39. 30)

आर्ये किमवमन्येयं स्त्रिया भर्ता हि दैवतम्॥

(*Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* II. 39. 31)

"Wife is the sole owner of her husband's fortune,' 'The husband is the only refuge to the wife,' 'If there is anything most sacred for a woman, it is her husband',"The parents and even the son are capable of giving a little but the husband gives boundless fortune. So every woman should worship her husband."

Woman is a 'सहधर्मचारिणी' and shadow of her husband and without a wife, one is not entitled to perform 'याग' or 'यज्ञ'. There is no separate duty to be performed by a lady except to obey her husband and nurse him. Rāma advises his mother to take care of king Daśaratha than to follow him to the forest. All our sacred texts insist on the value of grandeur of chastity and the fruits derived therefrom. This is true for all times, *Yuga* etc.

'A woman is behind the success of every man' so goes the saying. She showers her love on her husband and controls him by her affection and patience. She brings forth his progeny (वंशवृद्धिकरं सुतं). Our country is called a 'मातृभूमि' and mother earth is worshipped being a 'सर्वसहा, वसुन्धरा, धरणी'.

जननी जन्मभूमिश्च स्वर्गादपि गरीयसी।

Mother and motherland are even greater than heaven. Only on account of such chaste women, it rains, *Dharma* flourishes and the country prospers. In spite of modern civilization, women of India should realise their duty as prescribed in the holy texts and scriptures and practise them for the good of their families, for the sake of the country and the world at large. For men so many ritualistic duties have been prescribed and failure to do so amounts to sins. But for a lady, it is enough if she follows her husband in prosperity and adversity and behave like a good counsellor of the family. Women are the very embodiment of love, mercy and kindness and without them life would become meaningless. That country flourishes where women are respected. She brings forth *Śrī* to her family and her husband becomes a 'श्रीमान्' when she joins him.

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Husband-Wife Relationship in the Rāmacaritamānasa

—*Dr. Budhsen Chaturvedi*

Hindu marriage welds a man and a woman as husband and wife and unites the two souls permanently. A woman after marriage becomes a man's *Ardhāṅginī*, she becomes an equal partner in all his religious activities and secular undertakings. The association of husband and wife was believed to be so intimate that it continued even in the future lives. In the *Rāmacaritamānasa* there are many examples of conjugal relations of Rāma and Sītā, Daśaratha and Kausalyā and Rāvaṇa and Mandodarī which are propelled by traditional Hindu values. In the husband wife relationship the following values may be observed—

(1) Unswerving devotion to husband—

Sītā stands as a symbol of wifely devotion and fidelity, uniquely demonstrated by her unflinching resolve to share her husband's destiny with the banishment of her husband for fourteen years. Sītā's love is put to a severe test. Kausalyā suggests her to stay at home and provide solace to her.

जौं सिय भवन रहै कह अंबा। मोहि कहँ होइ बहुत अवलंबा॥

(*Rāmacaritamānasa* II. 59. 7)

Rāma advises her to stay at Ayodhya and render the service to her mother-in-law because for a woman there is no other duty more sacred than to adore reverently the feet of her husband's parents.

एहि ते अधिक धरमु नहिं दूजा। सादर सासु ससुर पद पूजा॥

(*Rāmacaritamānasa* II. 60. 5)

Daśaratha describes the terrible hardships of forest life and the comforts of home-living and persuades her to stay in the palace.

Sumantra's wife and the other ladies of Ayodhya assert her in gentle tones—"Nobody has banished you to the forest; therefore follow the instructions of your husband's parents and preceptor."

तुम्ह कहुँ तौ न दीन्ह बनबासू। करहु जो कहहिं ससुर गुर सासू॥

(*Rāmacaritamānasa* II. 77. 8)

But Sītā turns down all entreaties and suggestions and says that without the lord of her life, she would be like a body without a soul or a river without water.

जिय बिनु देह नदी बिनु बारी। तैसिअ नाथ पुरुष बिनु नारी॥

(*Rāmacaritamānasa* II. 65. 7)

She tells her husband that in case he left her in Ayodhya she would not survive.

राखिअ अवध जो अवधि लगि रहत न जनिअहिं प्रान।

(*Rāmacaritamānasa* II. 66)

In Daśaratha-Kausalyā relationship, Daśaratha is a wanton husband who becomes cold towards Kausalyā after the arrival of his younger wife Kaikeyī. Daśaratha's infatuation of Kaikeyī makes him forget all the claims of Kausalyā but she meekly submits to the wishes of her husband. In spite of his cold attitude she never harbours any ill will against any of his co-wives. As wife she knows that service to her husband is the only penance for her without which she will meet a wretched end.

Rāvaṇa-Mandodarī relationship also displays unflinching devotion of wife towards her husband. She advises Rāvaṇa several times to restore Sītā, handover the kingdom to his son and retire to the forest and worship Śrī Rāma so that her union with him may last till eternity.

नाथ भजहु रघुनाथहि अचल होइ अहिवात॥

(*Rāmacaritamānasa* VI. 7)

As a sincere and dutiful wife she tries many times to cure him of his delusion but everytime her husband takes her words lightly. She bitterly weeps to see the heads and arms of her husband littered on the battlefield. Even after Rāvaṇa's death her faith in Rāma does not diminish and she thanks him for

bestowing upon her husband the liberation which is difficult even for the ascetics to attain.

(2) Perfect obedience to husband—

The parting message given to a daughter by her parents (Himavān and Mayanā) at the time of marriage was—"Your husband is your deity; there is no other god for you."

करेहु सदा संकर पद पूजा। नारिधरमु पति देउ न दूजा॥

(*Rāmacaritamānasa* I. 101. 3)

The marriage vow required the husband and wife to submerge their personalities and co-operate with each other in the realisation of *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kāma*. The wife followed her husband as a shadow in his adversity as well as in prosperity and preferred death to separation from him. Anasūyā says—"A woman who treats her husband with disrespect—even though he is old, sick, dull-headed, blind, deaf, wrathful or most wretched—shall suffer various torments in hell. Devotion of body, speech and mind to her lord's feet is the only duty, sacred vow and penance of a woman."

बृद्ध रोगबस जड़ धनहीना। अंध बधिर क्रोधी अति दीना॥
ऐसेहु पति कर किएँ अपमाना। नारि पाव जमपुर दुख नाना॥
एकइ धर्म एक ब्रत नेमा। कायँ बचन मन पति पद प्रेमा॥

(*Rāmacaritamānasa* III. 4. 8—10)

(C) Ungrudging service to husband—

A Hindu woman could secure heaven only by her service to her husband. Nothing was so sinful for women as to forsake their wedded husbands. Women who are disloyal to their husbands are widowed in their young age wherever they may be reborn.

पति प्रतिकूल जनम जहँ जाई। बिधवा होइ पाइ तरुनाई॥

(*Rāmacaritamānasa* III. 4. 19)

It has been repeatedly expressed that women cannot achieve salvation without service to their husbands.

(D) Death preferable to separation from husband—

The average Hindu wife like Sāvitrī, if separated from her

husband, desired neither pleasure nor prosperity nor heaven; she preferred death to separation from him. Sītā after her abduction by Rāvaṇa, wailed piteously like a dun cow that had fallen into the hands of some barbarian.

अधम निसाचर लीन्हें जाई। जिमि मलेछ बस कपिला गाई॥

(*Rāmacaritamānasa* III. 28. 8)

In the Aśoka garden she had been squatting away the hours of night. Emaciated in body she wore a single braid of matted hair on her head and repeated to herself the list of Rāma's excellences.

कृस तनु सीस जटा एक बेनी। जपति हृदयँ रघुपति गुन श्रेनी॥

(*Rāmacaritamānasa* V. 7. 8)

The agony of separation from Rāma was like fire; her sighs fanned it as a gust of wind and in between stood her body like a heap of cotton, which would have been consumed in an instant.

बिरह अगिनि तनु तूल समीरा। स्वास जरइ छन माहिं सरीरा॥

(*Rāmacaritamānasa* V. 30. 7)

(5) Fidelity to husband—

The value of fidelity is the bedrock of Hindu family structure. Rāvaṇa threatened to cut off Sītā's head with his relentless sword in case she did not obey his command. She requested Rāvaṇa's *Candrahāsa* (glittering scimitar) with a cool sharp and good blade to remove the burning anguish of her heart caused by the separation from her lord by killing her.

चंद्रहास हरु मम परितापं। रघुपति बिरह अनल संजातं॥

(*Rāmacaritamānasa* V. 9. 5)

The Hindu woman strictly adhered to the *Pativratā* ideal. A tear falling from the eye of a chaste wife was strong enough to uproot a mighty tyrant like Rāvaṇa. To a wife her husband was her veritable deity, her dearest friend, the essence of all kinship, the fulfilment of all desires, the invaluable treasure and her life itself.

In short in the Vedic and epic society it was well-recognised that wife was the ornament of the house, nay, the wife herself

was the home. The husband and wife were complement to each other and the happiness of one depended on the other. In the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki, Sītā and Kausalyā are shown as learned women. They offer their daily prayers and worship gods in temples. Anasūyā with her husband was leading the life of an ascetic. Śabarī was a *Tapasvinī.* Tārā was a politician of no mean order. Vāli's wife and Rāvaṇa's wife also advised their husbands not to incur hostilities with Rāma who was not an ordinary mortal. They kept their fidelity and sincerity and advised whatever was best for their husbands.

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क्षेत्राद् वनाद् वा ग्रामाद् वा भर्तारं गृहमागतम्।
अभ्युत्थायाभिनन्दामि आसनेनोदकेन च॥
प्रमृष्टभाण्डा मृष्टान्ना काले भोजनदायिनी।
संयता गुप्तधान्या च सुसम्मृष्टनिवेशना॥

"When my husbands come back from field , forest or a village, I always welcome them standing at the door. I offer seat and water and every kind of hospitality. I keep the utensils neat and clean. I myself prepare tasty and pure food and serve timely to everyone. I keep my mind and senses under control and maintain a secret stock of food grains. I always keep my hermitage neat and clean by dusting, sweeping and besmearing with cow-dung."

—*Mahābhārata, Vana Parva* (233. 25-26)

नारी तुम केवल श्रद्धा हो विश्वास-रजत-नग-पग-तल में।
पीयूष-स्रोत सी बहा करो जीवन के सुन्दर समतल में॥

"Woman, thou art only faith embodied situated at the foot of silvery mountain of confident belief. Flow, flow thou in the beautiful field of life like a stream of immortal fluid.

—*Jayashankar Prasad*

Woman in Śrī Rāmacaritamānasa

—Chandan Lal Dhody

Woman has an honourable position in *Śrī Rāmacaritamānasa*. She is the *Śakti*; not the temptress for the satisfaction of the man's lust. The description of the feminine charm in this poem does not arouse any romantic feeling. In this respect, Gosvāmī Tulasīdāsa is unique in the entire universal literature. Without narrating the loveliness of the heroine's limbs, he presents a sublime picture of her beauty. Instances—

(1) Devī Pārvatī, (2) Sītā Devī, (3) About some other ladies.

(1) Devī Pārvatī—

(a) *Bhavānī's* unsurpassed beauty cannot be told by trillions of tongues. Trillions of tongues are at a loss to narrate her splendid splendour. Even the *Vedas* (the store of knowledge), *Śeṣa* (with two thousand tongues) and Sarasvatī (the goddess of speech) hesitate to relate it, for they would not be able to do justice to the subject"(I. 100).

(b) *Devī* Pārvatī apprises the *Sapta Ṛṣis* of her platonic love for Śiva—"Śiva, a perpetual *Yogī*, is desireless and free from material engagements. If knowing Him as such have I worshipped Him in action, thought and words, then my vow to wed Him will be fulfilled by God, the reservoir of kindness. Your observation that Śiva has burnt the cupid is on account of your nescience. The natural feature of the fire is that the chill can never approach it; if it does come near, it must get destroyed. Similar is the position between Śiva and the cupid"(I. 90).

(2) Sītā Devī—

In modelling Her, Brahmā has displayed his entire skill.

Beauty she beautifies. In the temple of brilliance there shines the lamp-flame......Spreading light, she moves about. Wherever she glances, there rains a row of white lotuses"(I. 230—32).

(3) About some other ladies—

"Charming and nimble damsels appear and disappear at the attics like the lightning flashes"(I. 347).

(2) Almost all female characters of *Śrī Rāmacaritamānasa,* including the demon ladies like Mandodarī and Trijaṭā, are sagacious. In her four sermons to Rāvaṇa, Mandodarī tells him Śrī Rāmacandra's greatness from different aspects. Trijaṭā consoles Sītā by emphasizing the Lord's magnificence. Sūrpaṇakhā advises Rāvaṇa as below—

"Governing without the moral code, massing wealth by unfair means, engagement in actions, howsoever good, without dedicating them to God the redeemer, and the acquisition of learning without the development of discernment, are a sheer waste of labour"(III. 21).

Svayamprabhājī has the unique privilege of guiding Hanumān Mahārāja. She helps him and his comrades reach the proper place at the seashore for his flight to Lanka (IV. 25).

Śabarī, an outcaste, illiterate and pauper woman, becomes worship-worthy by virtue of her devotion. The Lord explains her the ninefold *Bhakti* without her having asked for it (III. 35-36), while even Lakṣmaṇa and Bharata beg for His precepts (III. 14—16 and VII. 36—41).

Again, it is for a female (a fairy turned as alligator due to a curse) to apprise Hanumānjī of the wicked design of Kālanemi who tried to create obstruction in the former's flight to fetch the herb for the treatment of Lakṣmaṇa. (VI. 57-58).

Superbly splendid is the wisdom of the exalted ladies like Kausalyā and Sumitrā. Devī Kausalyā's cognizance of Rāma's divinity excels that of Daśaratha Mahārāja. She stands blessed with the vision of the Lord's universal form. (3) Now the explanation of the line at the end of the fifth canto about the

drum, the rustic, the *Śūdra*, the cattle and the woman. Here the illustrious author covers the universally prevalent anti-woman view with a marvellous modification. The rustics, the *Śūdras* (the humble workers in homes, farms, factories and offices, etc.) and the women merit concession. When erring, they deserve just a mild reprimand. Punishment is for the learned, affluent or the powerful. The equation with the drum (an important instrument played on important occasions) and the cattle (a useful commodity) has significance. While adjusting the drum for performance, the musician gives it gentle strokes. And, it is a delightful sight to watch the cow-boy tending the cattle, checking them with his delicate twig from going astray, and addressing them in affectionate phrases as "May you never be bitten by the snake", "May a thorn never prick you."

But if this line is wrongly interpreted to mean that the *Śūdras* and the women deserve to be beaten, then it does not deserve any serious notice, comes as it from the mouth of the sea who has earned disgrace for his silly behaviour and is termed as stupid, rogue and mean, etc.

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बाल्या वा युवत्या वा वृद्धयावाऽपि योषिता।
न स्वातन्त्र्येण कर्तव्यं किंचित्कार्यं गृहेष्वपि॥
बाल्ये पितुर्वशे तिष्ठेत्पाणिग्राहस्य यौवने।
पुत्राणां भर्तरि प्रेते न भजेत्स्त्री स्वतन्त्रताम्॥

"A woman should never do any act independently without prior permission from her guardians even within the four walls of her house irrespective of the fact whether she is a child young or old. While she is virgin and unmarried she must remain under her father, after marriage under her husband and in the old age after the demise of the husband under the supervision of her sons. She should never be left free."

—*Manu Smṛti* (V.147-148)

Mahābhārata—the Result of Draupadī's Insult

—*Basanta Kumar Dash*

Pāṇḍava Patnī (wife) Draupadī played paramount role in the historic battle of *Mahābhārata* fought in Kurukṣetra. The war was the result of Draupadī's insult. From this standpoint, we must judge the commanding character of Draupadī, who was extraordinary in every sense of the term. The world famous English dramatist, Shakespeare once said—"Judge not the play until the play is done". Hence, it will be appropriate for us to critically analyse her character in view of the role she played on various occasions.

Draupadī was extremely beautiful, dignified and dutiful, pleasant and charming, modest and majestic, lovely and attractive. Her magnetic beauty was an attraction for notorious characterless *Kauravas*, who were always in search of an opportunity to enjoy her physically at any cost. Unfortunately, that golden opportunity came, when Yudhiṣṭhira lost everything including Draupadī, while playing dice with *Kaurava*-chief Duryodhana. Duryodhana, forgetting all civilised human norms, out of pride, ordered his younger brother Duḥśāsana to drag menstruated Draupadī to *Kuru-Sabhā* from *Rānīhaṁsapura* and force her to sit on his thigh fully naked. Duḥśāsana immediately carried out this cruel inhuman order and dragged Draupadī from *Rānīhaṁsapura* by pulling her hair. Then, Duḥśāsana tried to undress her in front of all (*Pitāmaha* Bhīṣma, *Guru* Droṇācārya, *Mahādānī* Karṇa and others). One can well imagine what an insult was inflicted upon this noble and innocent lady. At that critical moment, she appealed to everybody to save her from such inhuman insult, but none came forward to defend her. In a male dominated

society that was not possible. Even then, she could appeal because of her powerful personality and very strong moral character. Her appeal, though ended in smoke for the timebeing, was not totally fruitless in later ages because it inspired and encouraged millions of oppressed and insulted ladies to open their mouths against the powers of wealth. This was her significant contribution for democratic movements of women all over the world. That royal lady was aristocratically democratic (right to appeal is a part of democracy). Still, she was not hopeless, although helpless. She had the strong determination and will to fight against all earthly evils. It will be appropriate here to quote one line from the poems of world-famous poet Ikeda of Japan— "It is all right if no one joins me." Again to quote the poet—

I will fight,
You will fight,
Fight until the day when,
On this earth,
Your rough hands will tremble
And the joy of life shines forth in your faces.

I will fight !
You must fight too !
Wherever you may be,
Holding fast to a steady tempo
Today again I fight !

To quote Swāmī Vivekānanda— "Arise, awake and sleep not till you reach your goal." Draupadī was an iron lady with strong fighting spirit. She knew that no weapon has yet been devised to conquer human spirit. She continued to fight spiritually. She could realise that spiritual power was stronger than physical power.

This practical realisation compelled her to surrender her ego before God-Almighty, the creator of the vast universe. Lord Kṛṣṇa was the God incarnated. Finding no other alternative, Draupadī prayed to Lord Kṛṣṇa in her heart of hearts to help her at this critical juncture of hardship by raising her hands above, which

proved that she did not try to defend herself, rather she surrendered herself completely before Him. Here let us quote a line from *Mahākāvya Sāvitrī* of very noted modern *Yogī* Śrī Aurobindo, the inventor of "Supramental consciousness"; "Complete surrender was her only strength." Then, all of a sudden, million and million pieces of *Sārīs* etc., were provided to her by *Chāyā* and *Māyā*, the two invisible godly messengers by the order of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Consequently, Duḥśāsana could not undress her in spite of repeated trials. The *Sārīs* collected from the body of Draupadī were countless and looked like mount Everest. Duḥśāsana engaged in this criminal work became senseless out of tiredness. Still sense did not prevail on Duryodhana. Shamelessly, he stood up to do the work himself. This total surrender to Lord Kṛṣṇa proved her full concentration of mind, which is the highest form of meditation, *Tapasyā*. By dint of this, Duḥśāsana could not make her naked.

When Duryodhana stood up to undress her again, she became very furious as if *Mā Kālī* (Goddess of destruction) was incarnated to destroy this universe of sinners. Out of anger, *Brahmāgni* (fire) came out of her burning eyes and the entire Hastināpura (palace of *Kauravas*)was on the verge of being burnt to ashes. Even the *Rānīhaṁsapura* could not be spared. Fire consumed everything even the clothings of the queens of *Kauravas*. *Mahārānī* Bhānumatī, wife of Duryodhana and other queens of his brothers out of fear, ran to *Kuru-Sabhā* site all fully naked to save their lives. This proved that furious Draupadī could do everything (she could create and she could destroy). This was the spiritual aspect of her character.

At that moment *Mahārājā* Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the father of *Kauravas* reached there with folded hands and persuaded Draupadī, his daughter-in-law to forget and forgive the misdeeds of his hundred sons. She had always been respectful towards her father-in-law and lowered before his feet. His sweet words consoled her. Immediately, she became calm, fire vanished and peace prevailed. Showing proper respect towards superiors was another noble aspect of her character, which deserves high

appreciation for all times to come. These things indicate that Draupadī could be furious and at the same time, merciful towards her worst enemies the *Kauravas*.

Draupadī was not an ordinary lady to bear everything simply believing in fate. She was a lady of action, quite revengeful believing in 'tit for tat' policy. She could not take rest for a while comfortably till her two very important vows were not fulfilled. So the result was the uncompromising battle of *Mahābhārata*. Always she used to remind her devoted God Lord Kṛṣṇa, who too called her Kṛṣṇā affectionately and her dearest husband *Mahābalī* Bhīma about how an innocent lady like her was insulted at *Kuru-Sabhā*, thus she was quite diplomatic. Beloved Kṛṣṇā's prestige was the prestige of Kṛṣṇa. This was same with Bhīma, who was also a man of promise. Wife's prestige was the prestige of husband. They wanted war.

Draupadī's joy knew no bounds, when she took bath in the blood of Duḥśāsana, killed by Bhīma and combed her uncombed hair. This was known *Veṇī Vandhana* in the politics of *Mahābhārata*. *Jānubhaṅga* of *Kurupati* again added to her pleasure for her vows were fulfilled though after very long interval. She waited, continued her struggle and finally won.

Hence, Draupadī's character was really very interesting impressive, inspiring, instructive and above all exemplary before all ladies of the present world. They should learn from her and continue their uncompromising struggle against money and muscle power of the ruling class very often used to exploit the ladies. The males of the world too learn from Draupadī's character that insulting fair-sex is an offence of serious nature and they will have the same fate of *Kauravas*, if they do so.

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N. B.—

This article does not seem to be based on *Mahābhārata*. Quite possibly it might have drawn inspiration from the local sources of Orissa where the writer hales from.

Gāndhārī and Kuntī

It is rightly observed that the social status of woman is a reliable yardstick to measure the social and cultural advancement of a society. If we look into the comparatively dark periods of *Mahābhārata* which is correctly assessed to represent the then Hindu society and present a complete and authentic picture of Hindu life, we will find that *Mahābhārata* eventhough basically being a *Dharmagrantha,* its approach is realistic. Its characters are not unduly polished. They are depicted what they were. Unlike Vālmīki, aim and object of the author of *Mahābhārata* was to portray a realistic portrait of society and through this to decide what is *Dharma* and what is *Adharma* (religion and irreligion).

Gāndhārī is one of the most prominent female characters of *Mahābhārata*. She was the daughter of Subala, the king of Gāndhāra. What her real name was, we do not know but we know only this much that she came from Gāndhāra so she was known as Gāndhārī. In her adolescence she acquired a boon to have one hundred sons. We do not know the secret behind this desire although it looks a bit unpsychological.

She was married to Dhṛtarāṣṭra the eldest among the princes of *Kuru* dynasty in Hastināpura. He was blind by birth. When Gāndhārī came to know that her would-be husband was blind she herself decided to renounce every comfort to be experienced through eyes and herself blinded her by tying a strip of cloth over her eyes which she maintained throughout her life. Wise or unwise, it was a unique thing. Particularly it indicates the sense of her conjugal fidelity and chastity towards her husband and it was a mirror to

show how far she could go on the path of sacrifice. There is no doubt about it and there cannot be two opinions. Vedavyāsa is eloquent enough to eulogize the qualities of Gāndhārī.

As expected, Gāndhārī is an orthodox *Kṣatriya* lady and a mother queen. On occasions when even Dhṛtarāṣṭra does not feel him competent to handle his wayward crown-prince Duryodhana, he approaches Gāndhārī for help to tame him. It is a different thing that Duryodhana never took her words seriously and made no compliance. She never failed from doing her wifely duties. She always tried to instigate and motivate Dhṛtarāṣṭra to follow the path of righteousness and never to deviate from it. It was a cruel joke of destiny that neither her life-partner paid any attention to what she advised nor her son.

The deceptive gambling match Yudhiṣṭhira has lost completely and lost his everything including his beloved brothers and his inseparable wife. What worthy or unworthy deeds were done and the debates were made, it was all over. In the end Dhṛtarāṣṭra granted two boons to Draupadī and consequently the *Pāṇḍavas* were released from their slavery and regained the kingdom of Indraprastha. They bade goodbye to Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his court and left for Indraprastha. In the meantime Duryodhana approached him and asked his permission for re-inviting Yudhiṣṭhira for the play of dice. He succeeded in his mission and was granted permission to do so. It is then when Gāndhārī again intervened and offered her most sincere and rightful advice and again she dismally failed to dissuade her husband and the king of Hastināpura from doing a wrong thing and committing a great sin that could destroy the entire *Kuru* dynasty. But what was the result? Dhṛtarāṣṭra said—

यथाब्रवीन्महाराजो गान्धारीं धर्मदर्शिनीम्।
अन्तः कामं कुलस्यास्तु न शक्नोमि निवारितुम्॥
यथेच्छन्ति तथैवास्तु प्रत्यागच्छन्तु पाण्डवाः।
पुनर्द्यूतं च कुर्वन्तु मामकाः पाण्डवैः सह॥

(*Mahābhārata Sabhāparva* 75.11-12)

It was a fatal verdict of a dictator—"Come what may. Let the dynasty be annihilated. But I cannot stop Duryodhana. Let his will be done. Let the *Paṇḍavas* return and play again."

The poor Gāndhārī. She was helpless to be a silent spectator and a witness. So the destiny was implemented. What should have been done, was not done. It was an occasion when the calamity could have been averted. She tried her best but failed.

So far as Dhṛtarāṣṭra is concerned it was quite expected of him. After all he was a *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* and he justified his name. The word *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* means—"धृतं बलादधिकृतं राष्ट्रं येन स धृतराष्ट्रः" (One who has the nation in his possession by force). A person who becomes *Dhṛtarāṣṭra* is bound to be blind eventhough he may have one thousand eyes like Indra. It was the fatherly affection misplaced in a son like Duryodhana which caused complete destruction of innumerable royal families.

Even against the solemn advice of Vidura and Gāndhārī he always supported every wrong or right proposed by Duryodhana. Gāndhārī was always opposed to or she atleast did not approve of the vicious plans of her crooked son and the wicked brother.

But it cannot be said that she was not a weak lady. Her opposition had always been a timid one. She never adopted a strong and ferocious attitude against Duryodhana and his activities. There are certain things which put a big question mark about her intentions. For example, she was a silent witness of all humiliation and molestation meted out to Draupadī by her sons and never spoke a word of opposition but there happened a very unexpected thing. Just in the bright daylight a jackal entered the royal sacrificial canopy (यज्ञशाला) and started howling followed by the donkeys bellowing. It was very inauspicious omen. The God-fearing Gāndhārī shuddered in her heart and she all of a sudden woke up as if from a deep slumber. Immediately she talked to Vidura and both of them went to Dhṛtarāṣṭra and there was a hectic discussion between them. It was then only that Dhrtarāṣṭra scolded Duryodhana and granted

certain boons to Draupadī which she very judiciously, religiously and rightfully asked. But for this incident of howling jackal in *Yajñaśālā*, what Gāndhārī would have done is anybody's guess. She was a religious lady no doubt but a rationally-minded person will definitely form an opinion that she is guilty of conniving the criminal activities of Duryodhana because he was her own blood and flesh. There is a big question if this was not the secret of her putting a strip of cloth over her eyes. She cannot be charged to be an accomplice with her son in his heinous crimes but she can certainly be blamed for not taking firm step against him. But one thing is certain. She occupied a very high and prestigious place in the domestic, social and political spheres of the kingdom of Hastināpura. We find a glimpse of her ferocious outlook when the five *Pāṇḍavas* headed by Śrī Kṛṣṇa went to her to pay their respect and console her. It was the bereaved motherhood burning with passion and anger. When she raised her eyebrows only the nails of Yudhiṣthira's toes came within the range of her look and they at once blackenned. She hurled a curse on Śrī Kṛṣṇa also about the complete destruction of *Yadu* dynasty. Such was the majestic power of her piety and chastity. If she would have exercised this power in anyway *Mahābhārata* war might not have happened.

Paradoxical to Gāndhārī, Kuntī is more symbolic than a real woman of flesh and blood. Both were daughters of aristocratic kings. Both were married in the *Kuru* dynasty of Hastināpura. Both were sisters-in-law, Gāndhārī being the senior and Kuntī as junior. Both were prime examples of chastity. Kuntī is enumerated among the five *Kanyās*. The word *Kanyā* lexicographically means "unmarried girl." How Kuntī was considered to be a *Kanyā* is a subject of some other independent article. Here we have to feel content that she was supposed to be *Kanyā* even after giving birth to four sons. The subject matter of this article is the status of Kuntī in the society and how she commanded respect and admiration from all concerned.

Unlike Gāndhārī, Kuntī lived as an ascetic throughout her whole life. Even in her childhood she was a *Tapasvinī*, pleased a sage and received a secret *Mantra* from *Atharvaveda* to please any deity which she exercised during her conjugal life to have sons Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma and Arjuna from three different divinities. Those days it was proper to procreate issues from a celestial being other than the social husband. It was not considered a matter of shame and had full social sanction. Perhaps this might have been the reason why whe was known as *Kanyā*.

After the death of Pāṇḍu, Mādrī the co-wife became Satī with the dead body of Pāṇḍu leaving her two sons—Nakula and Sahadeva in the charge of Kuntī. She was quite confident that it was Kuntī and Kuntī alone who could rear all the five children impartially. Mādrī knew that she herself was no match to Kuntī in religiousness and impartial behaviour. She thought that her sons were more safe and secure in the deserving hands of Kuntī than her own. That is why she prevailed on Kuntī to survive. Later happenings proved that she was right. Nakula and Sahadeva also perhaps could not have loved Mādrī more than they did love Kuntī and respected. She was just an embodiment of motherhood to all the five equally.

Now she was queen no more. She had to live and bring up her children under the protection and care of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Bhīṣma and Vidura. As a widow she lived an ascetic life and employed all her time and energy to see that her sons become religious and dutiful persons in every sense of the term which of course they did become. There was no end to her sorrows and sufferings hereafter. She had to move from village to village and forest to forest but her greatness never deserted her. While she was living in *Ekacakrā* in the house of a brahman, she willingly sacrificed her own son to save the life of one member from the brahman family. Bhīma killed that demon it was a different thing. It makes no difference regarding her generosity

and the dutifulness of a *Kṣatriya* lady. Her message to Yudhiṣṭhira through Śrī Kṛṣṇa regarding their duties is a classical example of her bravery and righteousness.

Now let us see what and how the other members of the society thought of and behaved to her. To all the five *Pāṇḍavas* and Draupadī the words of Kuntī were no less than a law. Nobody could even dream of disobeying the words of the mother. They were always alert to find out what she wished and what she wished was complied to without fail. We find no references in the whole of *Mahābhārata* that anybody would have committed any act of disrespect to her. When *Pāṇḍavas* were in exilement and lived a pseudonymous life, she remained in Hastināpura and lived under the protection and guidance of Vidura. While living in the royal palace of Hastināpura, she gave no opportunity to royal family and the courtiers to raise the finger of objection of any kind. She always paid due respect to Gāndhārī, Dhṛtarāṣṭra and other elderly venerable persons. She was just like a lotus plant in the water of *Kuru* kingdom. We do not find any occasion for Kuntī to show her anger. Even after enduring so much torture from Duryodhana she never lost her temper and did never speak a single word of ill-will. Perhaps in her heart there was no room for worldly vices.

After *Mahābhārata* war was over and Yudhiṣṭhira was enthroned, she served Gāndhārī like a younger sister or a maid servant. The terrible experiences of the past left no impression at all and she remained calm and serene throughout her life like a deep ocean. It is only Kuntī in *Mahābhārata* who can be said to possess a spotless character. When Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī left for forest she accompanied them. Her reply given to Bhīma is a classic in itself.

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Women's Education in India till the Mahābhārata Age

—Prativa Devi

Not only charity but education too begins at home. The parents can impart best possible education to their children. In the famous line of *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* it is said—"मातृमान् पितृमानाचार्यवान् पुरुषो वेद" which means that a child does not receive so much good from any other person as he does from his loving mother and father.

Prior to the Upanishadic period woman's education was very popular. Learned women were called *Ṛṣikās* and *Brahmavādinīs*. The young unmarried daughters were qualified for marriage on the basis of their education. The *Ṛgveda* mentions—"An unmarried young learned daughter should be married to a bridegroom who like her is learned. Never think of giving in marriage a daughter of very young age" (III. 55.16). The *Yajurveda* repeats the same thing and so it says—"A young daughter who has observed *Brahmacarya* (finished her studies) should be married to a bridegroom who like her is learned" (VIII. 1). The *Atharvaveda* says clearly that—"ब्रह्मचर्येण कन्या युवानं विन्दते पतिम्" which means a maiden wins a young husband through *Brahmacarya* or Vedic studentship. The *Ṛgveda* and *Yajurveda* speak of women's education in the following verses—

"Mother should impart proper education to her children so as to broaden the horizon of their ideas" (*Ṛgveda* V. 47.6). So it is directed—"O king and other nobles, make adequate arrangements to train lady teachers for imparting training to girl students who, on obtaining maturity, select for themselves their partners for marriage" (*Yajurveda* X. 6).

The *Vedas* mention a number of *Ṛṣikās* or learned ladies in their various verses—the foremost of these *Ṛṣikās* is Ghoṣā (*Ṛgveda* X. 39-40), the wife of the great seer, Kakṣīvān. She has been mentioned in the *Ṛgveda* in two long hymns; 39 and 40 of the tenth *Maṇḍala* stand to her credit. This daughter of a king (*Ṛgveda* X. 40.15) is equally important in her concept of divinity and the invocation of the *Aśvins*, who in consequence of her prayer to them, give her Kakṣīvān for her husband in an advanced age. Lopāmudrā (*Ṛgveda* I.179.1—6), another lady, is credited with having composed a hymn jointly with her husband Agastya. Apālā (*Ṛgveda* VIII. 91.1—7) addresses hymn 91 in the tenth book and in like manner invokes Agni in the fifth book. To Romaśā (*Ṛgveda* I.126.6-7); (*Sāmaveda* 550-51); 1016.18; 1631.33), another wife of Kakṣīvān, and the daughter of king Svanaya, and the grand-daughter of Bhāvya, is ascribed a beautiful verse of fine imagery and tender feeling in which she says that she is harmless and docile. This she utters to her father-in-law, the father of Kakṣīvān, while presenting herself after her marriage to the kinsmen of her groom. The seer and speaker of the first verses of hymn 18 of the tenth book of the *Ṛgveda* is Vasukara's wife, while the mother of the Gaupāyanas alongwith her sons, Bandhu, Subandhu, Śrutabandhu and Viprabandhu, is that of 10. 60. The latter is also the independent seer of the sixth verse of that hymn.

Indrāṇī, the powerful consort of Indra, is the speaker of the verses 2.4—7,9,10,15, 18,22 and 23 of the hymn 86 of the tenth book of *Ṛgveda*. She is also the independent *Ṛṣi* of a powerful hymn entitled "The jealous wife's spell" (*Ṛgveda* X. 145). Yamī, an important lady, is the author of the hymn no. X. 10, jointly with her brother. In the entire *Ṛgveda* she stands as a lady of her own type. The dialogue, contained in the hymn of which she is the principal speaker, is the earliest example of dramatic expression. Another lady of such stature can be seen in the character of Urvaśī, who was part author of hymn X.95 with

an *Apsarā*, wedded to king Purūravā in contractual marriage, and was the seer and speaker of the verses X.2,5,7,9,11,13,15,16 and 18 of *Ṛgveda.*

In the Rigvedic period the ladies had their military training for self defence. Even they accompanied their husbands to the dreadful battles. Viśpalā, the wife of king Khela, like Kaikeyī of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, accompanied her lord to the battlefield where she loses her leg, which was replaced with an iron one by the *Aśvins*. The *Ṛgveda* describes this incident in the following lines—

"When in the time of night, in Khela's battle, a leg was severed like a wild bird's pinion, straight ye gave Viśpalā a leg of iron that she might move what time the conflict opened" (I. 116.15).

One more example can be cited here which speaks about the courage of a lady because of her military training at the *Gurukula*. Mudgalānī (X.102.2) was a woman equipped with military training. She was the wife of Mudgala and is credited with having driven the chariot for her husband in battle, like Subhadrā of the *Mahābhārata*. She conquered her husband's enemy. The heroic deed is described in the *Ṛgveda* in the following lines—

"Loose in the wind the woman's robe was streaming
What time she won a car-load with a thousand.
The charioteer in fight was Mudgalānī.
She, Indra's dart,
Heaped up the prize of battle.
In hope of victory that bull was harnessed—
Kāśī (Mudgalānī), the driver, urged him on with shouting.
As he ran swiftly with the car behind him his lifted
Heels pressed close on Mudgalānī."

(X. 102. 2-3)

In the *Ṛgveda*, like Ghoṣā, Godhā, Viśvavārā, Apālā, there are as many as twenty-seven women poet-seers who contributed their writings. One of the seers, Vāk, the daughter of the sage

Ambhṛṇa, realizes her oneness with the Absolute and cries out in delight—"I am the sovereign queen...He who eats does so through me; he who sees, breathes or hears does so through me. Creating all things, I blow forth like the wind. Beyond heaven, beyond the earth am I, so vast is my greatness" (*Ṛgveda* X. 125). *Ṛgveda* speaks about women singers (IX. 66. 8), women dancers (I. 9. 1, 4), and women warriors (X. 39. 40). Patañjali has written about a woman spear bearer (IV. 1.15.6). Besides these educated ladies there are a few more to add. They were—(1) Kadrū (*Ṛgveda* II. 6. 8), (2) Viśvavārā (*Ṛgveda* V.28.3), (3) Vāgāmbhṛṇī (*Ṛgveda* X), (4) Paulomī (*Ṛgveda* X), (5) Jaritā (*Ṛgveda* X), (6) Sāvitrī (*Ṛgveda* X), (7) Devayānī (*Ṛgveda* X), (8) Nodhā (*Sāmaveda Pūrvārcchika*, 13.1), (9) Ākṛṣṭabhāṣā (*Sāmaveda*), (10) Sikatānivāvarī (*Sāmaveda Uttarārcchika* 1.4) and (11) Gaupāyanā (*Sāmaveda Uttarārcchika* 22.4).

As in the Vedic period, the Upanishadic period too had its women's education. The women were ranked very high among the scholars. Maurice Winternitz, without any hesitation, admits—"In the *Upaniṣads* however, we find not only kings but also women and even people of low birth who take active part in the philosophical efforts and are often in possession of the highest knowledge." Gārgī, the learned daughter of sage Vacaknu, did not leave Yājñavalkya without argument when he dared to claim the reward of the thousand cows offered by king Janaka. She intervened twice, challenging Yājñavalkya to debate, as we find in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, and ranked among the eight scholars of that period (*B.U.* 3.6, 3.8). In the *Ṛṣitarpaṇa*, while offering water to the sages, among the male sages, including Gārgī, two more women sages—Vaḍavī Prātitheyī and Sulabhā Maitreyī, are also recited as homage to the women sages. (*Āśwalāyana Gṛhya Sūtra* 3.4.4.). In the same *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (II. 4. 3), Maitreyī boldly refuses to accept the property from Yājñavalkya and politely argues—"What should I do with that worldly wealth through which I cannot

be immortal?" Umā Haimavatī, a woman scholar who discourses on *Brahma*, cannot be ignored in the *Kena Upaniṣad* (III. 12). R. D. Rānāde has classified the women of the Upanishadic period into three different types—"Kātyāyanī, the woman of the world, who is only once mentioned in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*; Maitreyī, the type of a spiritual woman, a fit consort to the philosopher Yājñavalkya; and Gārgī, the Upanishadic suffragette, who, fully equipped in the art of intellectual warfare, dares to wrangle with Yājñavalkya even at the court of king Janaka where a number of great philosophers are assembled."

The position of women in the entire Vedic period till post-Upanishadic period was very high in the society. To think of women as the gate of sin was unknown to the people. *Manu Smṛti*, one of the most ancient of all *Smṛtis*, pays the greatest tribute to the women in a voice that cannot lose its rhythm in course of time—

यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः।
यत्रैतास्तु न पूज्यन्ते सर्वास्तत्राफलाः क्रियाः॥

(*Manusmṛti* III. 56; *Cf. Mahābhārata* 13.45.5)

"Where women are honoured, there the gods are delighted, but where they are insulted, all sacred rites become futile."

Till the post-Vedic period women were entitled to wear the sacred thread. Gobhila, one of the well-known law-givers of the post-Vedic period, describes in connection with the marriage ceremony, that the bridegroom should lead the bride properly clothed and wearing the sacred thread (*Gobhila Gṛhyasūtra* 7.2.1.19), *Ṛgveda* (X. 85.41 and *Atharvaveda* XIV. 2.4), and reciting Vedic *Mantras*, participating in the *Yajñas* (Vedic sacrifices).

Etymologically, the word *Patnī* (wife) itself is evidence that women were participating in *Yajña* (Pāṇini IV.1.33). Pāṇini referred to the women's education during his period. A woman student of the *Kaṭha* school was called *Kaṭhī*, and the *Ṛgvedic Bahvṛca* school, *Bahvṛcī*. Kātyāyana and Patañjali refer to *Brāhmaṇa* women students studying the grammatical system of

Āpiśala, Brāhmaṇī (*Aṣṭa.* 4.1.14. *Vār.*3). Pāṇini refers to female students as *Chātrī* and their hostels *Chātriśālā* (*Aṣṭa.* 6.2.86) The wife of an *Ācārya* is referred to as *Ācāryāṇī* (*Aṣṭa.* 4.1.49), but *Ācāryā* was the title of female teachers corresponding in status to an *Ācārya.*

The *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata,* which are later than the *Upaniṣads,* are the best documents for citing more examples of how women were educated in Ayodhya during the period of Rāma (*Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa; Bāla-Kāṇḍa,* Ch. 6) and they were entitled to *Upanayana* or initiation for Vedic studies. In the age of the *Mahābhārata*, Gāndhārī, Kuntī and Draupadī were the examples of such women who were taking part in politics of that period.

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पिता पितामहो भ्राता सकुल्यो जननी तथा।
कन्याप्रदः पूर्वनाशे प्रकृतिस्थः परः परः॥
अप्रयच्छन्समाप्नोति भ्रूणहत्यामृतावृतौ।
गम्यं त्वभावे दातॄणां कन्या कुर्यात्स्वयंवरम्॥

"The father, grandfather, elder brother, any senior member of the family or the mother are authorised persons to make *Kanyādāna*. The claim of father in respect of *Kanyādāna* comes first and after him anyone of the above mentioned persons in the absense of the previous one is authorised. If none of them is available the girl is free to make her own choice of the husband."

—*Yājñavalkya Smṛti* (I. 63-64)

Every wife and every husband will have to embrace renunciation. You know Christ, according to the Christian world, is a picture of renunciation. So if every wife becomes a picture of renunciation, she can save her husband.

—*Swami Rama Tirtha*

Draupadī—the Gārgī of Mahābhārata

—R. C. M. Tripathi

'यत्र भारते तत्र भारते' is a very realistic assessment of the epic *Mahābhārata*. The epic represents a most accurate picture of the society in that period which is not at all out of date even today. When we look around us we find everywhere the living characters of *Mahābhārata* actively busy in playing their parts with seemingly no change at all. Most of modern political leaders represent Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the blind king—blinded due to his undue parental affection.

Yudhiṣṭhira and Duryodhana are busy in playing dice and Yudhiṣṭhira losing every stake. Dhṛtarāṣṭra eventhough posing to be impartial, is very happy to learn that his son is winning—

धृतराष्ट्रस्तु तं हृष्टः पर्यपृच्छत् पुनः पुनः।
किं जितं किं जितमिति ह्याकारं नाभ्यरक्षत॥

(*Sabhāparva* 65. 43)

"Dhṛtarāṣṭra, happy in his hearts, was asking again and again—'Did my side win'? 'What did it win'? He could not even conceal his emotions."

So, that was Dhṛtarāṣṭra quite exposed and visibly appeared in his true form and colour which is very akin to the top political leaders of today.

What is baffling to the modern mind is the conspicuous outlook of the epic-age society towards the women. We find Gāndhārī. She is a type in herself. On the other hand we find Kuntī who is the embodiment of righteousness, feminine chastity and impartiality and so on. We find that nobody ever dared to pay any disrespect to them. Then we come to the

conclusion that the womenfolk commanded respect, admiration and even veneration in the society. But just by their side we find Draupadī, unique in herself, most respected and most humiliated at the same time—a towering personality. We are overawed when we see her in the form of a poser like Gārgī in the court of Janaka, shooting questions and doggedly adamant to demand an answer which puzzled even a *Dharmācārya* like Bhīṣma and silenced him. Rather he had to surrender.

When Prātikāmī instructed by Duryodhana submitted to her to come to the *Kaurava* court as Yudhiṣṭhira had staked and lost her in the game of dice, she at once asked him to go and inquire from Yudhiṣṭhira whether he staked her prior to staking his ownself or afterwards. It was a very delicate question having its far-reaching effect. Yudhiṣṭhira kept mum and made no reply. After that what happened, was most awful, degrading and demoralising. Duḥśāsana manhandled, humiliated and literally dragged her by her hair to the court of the *Kauravas*. There she asked questions more than one. They were all related to the propriety of a game of dice, the morality of intention of playing parties and religiously a most technical question whether a person who has lost himself as a wager and become a slave is authorised to put at stake a queen? She was not the sole wife of Yudhiṣṭhira. She had four other husbands. Another implication of her question was if Yudhiṣṭhira in his present position was authorised to lay as a wager the wife of other four brothers also. If it was so, Arjuna and Bhīma etc., had many more wives other than Draupadī. What was their position? Had they also become a servant like Draupadī. If not, why was Draupadī alone singled out? About the malafide intention of Duryodhana and his associates she put another question and it was about the propriety of malafide intention. Śakuni and Duryodhana knew the weakness of Yudhiṣṭhira still they motivated him to play the game. Whether this act was rightful or not, it was to be decided by the religious authorities like Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Kṛpa. She says—

द्रोणस्य भीष्मस्य च नास्ति सत्त्वं
क्षत्तुस्तथैवास्य महात्मनोऽपि।
राज्ञस्तथा हीममधर्ममुग्रं
न लक्षयन्ते कुरुवृद्धमुख्याः॥
इमं प्रश्नमिमे ब्रूत सर्व एव सभासदः।
जितां वाप्यजितां वा मां मन्यध्वे सर्वभूमिपाः॥

(*Sabhāparva* 67. 41)

"It seems that there is no strength and power left in Droṇācārya and Bhīṣma, Mahātmā Vidura and Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the king. It is only then, that these elderly persons of *Kuru* dynasty are keeping mum and not casting an eye on this terribly sinful act of Duryodhana."

"All courtiers are beseeched to give a verdict on my question. What do they feel? Am I rightfully won by Duryodhana or not?"

These were not simple words but whips which lashed the entire court with a few exceptions. Everybody was pained. Droṇācārya was mum. Bhīṣma gave a very ambiguous reply. Yudhiṣṭhira was almost fainted and the other *Pāṇḍavas* were burning with rage. But the undaunted Draupadī went on flogging them with her sharp questioning words and a burning look. She went on hammering to have a reply to her questions. It was only her undaunted spirit that Bhīṣma surrendered in the end. He had to acknowledge his inability to come to a decision and make a reply. His reply was very timid and quite unbecoming of him. Bhīṣma said—

न धर्मसौक्ष्म्यात् सुभगे विवेक्तुं
शक्नोमि ते प्रश्नमिमं यथावत्।
अस्वाम्यशक्तः पणितुं परस्वं
स्त्रियाश्च भर्तुर्वशतां समीक्ष्य॥
द्यूतेऽद्वितीयः शकुनिर्नरेषु
कुन्तीसुतस्तेन निसृष्टकामः।
न मन्यते तां निकृतिं युधिष्ठिर-
स्तस्मान्न ते प्रश्नमिमं ब्रवीमि॥

(*Sabhāparva* 67. 47,49)

"My child, *Dharma* being extremely subtle, I am unable to thrash out competently the problem posed by you. A person other than rightful master cannot put at stake any belonging of others but at the same time the ladies are traditionally and customarily subordinate to their husbands. So I am unable to make a definite reply or pass a correct judgement."

"This Śakuni, a matchless player of dice, has purposely induced Yudhiṣṭhira for the play of dice and injected in him the idea of putting you at stake but since Yudhiṣṭhira does not take it in that light, so I am unable to decide what is what."

It is surprising that Bhīṣma, one of the twelve counted *Dharmācāryas* from Yama to Vyāsa, failed to decide what was correct and what was incorrect. We are surprised to hear from Bhīṣma that since Yudhiṣṭhira did not think so, he could not decide. Did his decision depend upon what Yudhiṣṭhira or anybody else thought? Did he completely fail to exercise his own intellectual faculties? What type of *Dharmācārya* was he? This type of reply cannot satisfy a modern critical mind. Not only that, Draupadī also was not satisfied. So, she persisted and persisted to have a logical reply and then in the end what Bhīṣma said is not only interesting but quite capable of exposing his utter defeat. A timid Bhīṣma said—

उक्तवानस्मि कल्याणि धर्मस्य परमा गतिः।
लोके न शक्यते ज्ञातुमपि विज्ञैर्महात्मभिः॥
बलवांश्च यथा धर्मं लोके पश्यति पूरुषः।
स धर्मो धर्मवेलायां भवत्यभिहतः परः॥
न विवेक्तुं च ते प्रश्नमिमं शक्नोमि निश्चयात्।
सूक्ष्मत्वाद् गहनत्वाच्च कार्यस्यास्य च गौरवात्॥
नूनमन्तः कुलस्यायं भविता नचिरादिव।
तथा हि कुरवः सर्वे लोभमोहपरायणाः॥

(*Sabhāparva* 69. 14—17)

"Kalyāṇī, I have already said that the course of *Dharma* is very subtle. Even the most scholarly exalted souls are

sometimes puzzled to appreciate it properly and accurately."

"(It is observed that) what a mighty person considers to be *Dharma*, generally people accept it to be so. The nature of *Dharma* propounded by the weaker party is muffled up."

"I am unable to pass a judgement or make a decisive reply to your query because it is very subtle, very complicated and very grave by nature."

"Most certainly this *Kuru* dynasty is fast approaching its destruction. This is why all the *Kauravas* are captivated by the greed and infatuation."

We can very well see that Bhīṣma eventhough was sure of *Kauravas* being on the wrong side, could not give a frank and just reply to the question of Draupadī.

On the other hand in the entire *Kuru Sabhā* there were only two persons—Vidura and Vikarṇa, who passed very clear judgement in the favour of Draupadī. Vikarṇa vehemently advocated her case and forcefully requested all courtiers present in the court to give their opinion frankly. Vidura was very clear that Yudhiṣṭhira had no right at all to put Draupadī at the stake of dice. Thus she was still the queen of Indraprastha eventhough her husbands were enslaved. Vikarṇa, very emphatically raised this complicated question—

साधारणी च सर्वेषां पाण्डवानामनिन्दिता।
जितेन पूर्वं चानेन पाण्डवेन कृतः पणः॥
इयं च कीर्तिता कृष्णा सौबलेन पणार्थिना।
एतत् सर्वं विचार्याहं मन्ये न विजितामिमाम्॥

(*Sabhāparva* 68. 23-24)

"The chaste lady Draupadī is a common wife of the five *Pāṇḍavas* and not only that of Yudhiṣṭhira. Secondly Yudhiṣṭhira had already lost himself and then he staked her."

"It was Śakuni, the son of Subala, desirous of winning the wager induced Yudhiṣṭhira to do so. So it is my considered opinion that Draupadī was not won by Śakuni."

Vidura also was of the same opinion. He said—

न हि दासीत्वमापन्ना कृष्णा भवितुमर्हति।
अनीशेन हि राज्ञैषा पणे न्यस्तेति मे मतिः॥

(*Sabhāparva* 66. 4)

"Draupadī can never be enslaved since Yudhiṣṭhira had lost every right to put her at stake after himself being lost in the game. This is my considered opinion."

We see that in the court attended by mute dummies there was only a three-membered Bench. Out of them two passed their judgement in clear-cut wordings in the favour of Draupadī while one was at his wit's end and could not know what to say. There remains no doubt in a rational mind that Draupadī won her case by the majority judgement of the Bench. But in spite of these farcical events the might of Duryodhana proved to be right and a lady of Draupadī's stature was as much insulted and humiliated as nobody else could have been. It was the last nail in the coffin of Duryodhana and the *Kuru* dynasty.

Now we have to look into what others feel and expressed about what they thought of her. Kuntī had a very high opinion of Draupadī, no doubt. What Gāndhārī thought, we hardly find any references in *Mahābhārata*. Among male members except Duryodhana, Karṇa and co. every elderly and responsible person of the royal circle had a respectful regard for her. Anybody never spoke any ill of her. Everybody regarded and respected her with a sense of awe sprinkled with affection and love. We find a chapter in *Mahābhārata* containing a friendly and affectionate dialogue between Satyabhāmā and Draupadī. It throws a flood of light on her qualities like chastity, fidelity forbearance, endurance, patience, working capacity, her managing ability, handling stately duties, maintaining accounts of state income and expenditure and so on. Satyabhāmā was amazed to see that all the five *Pāṇḍavas* just watched her face to guess and find out any hint of what she desired. They never hesitated even for a moment to do anything possible or impossible, for her. It must

have appeared fantastic and unbelievable to so many others. It is a worth reading episode in *Mahābhārata*.

Like Sītā of Vālmīki, Draupadī passed a considerably long period of twelve years in forests facing all sorts of physical inconveniences. It is more than creditable on her part that she earned and obtained an *Akṣayapātra* from the sungod which could feed up persons innumerable and the food cooked in that utensil never exhausted till Draupadī herself took meals. While in the forest she did every manual labour and performed all her domestic duties single handed unassisted by any maids. She underwent many hardships and suffered undesirable treatment more than once, meted out to her.

The ill treatment she received in Virāṭa Nagara while pseudonymously living (incognito) at the hands of Kīcaka. There too she appealed for justice and failed to get it. But these unbearable and intolerable incidents could not break her spirit. In every condition favourable or unfavourable she never departed from the path of *Dharma* and never lost her balance of mind.

On the other side she never forgot the unjust humiliation neither at the hands of Duryodhana nor Jayadratha nor Jaṭāsura nor Kīcaka. Everyone of them had to pay the price in the shape of his valuable life. She never forgot the ill treatment in the *Kuru Sabhā*. Whenever there was an opportunity, she goaded, instigated and motivated mostly Yudhiṣṭhira, Krsna, Bhīma and Arjuna to take revenge of her insult. For the long thirteen years she never braided her hairs. Her unbraided locks like venomous serpentine always hissed in the ears of these noble warriors. Whenever she narrated to them her frightful experience and feelings with tearful eyes they were moved and felt that her insult should justifiedly be revenged and the result was the great war of *Mahābhārata* gratifying her ambitions. Undoubtedly she was a great lady of extraordinary calibre. No wonder that in spite of her having five husbands she is even today remembered as a *Kanyā* i.e., unmarried girl—a virgin.

Śakti Worship: Evolution of the Concept of Cāmuṇḍā in the Purāṇas

—*Dr. Ratna Sharma*

The doctrine of *Śakti* finds an elaborate exposition in the *Purāṇas* and the *Upa-Purāṇas*. These texts are very rich in content and provide us with valuable material for an accurate analysis of *Śaktivāda*. The popular myths and legends in the *Purāṇas* portray the socio-religious order of the contemporary society and have effected a silent revolution in the religious ideas and practices of the people and form the basis of popular Hinduism.

The worship of Mother Goddess had gained great prominence in the vast extent of the Puranic literature. With the rise in the temple building activities, she was now placed with her consort or even independently in the temples. She was somehow being associated with one or the other member of the Hindu Triad with greater power and prominence. She was called *Mahāśakti* i.e., *Śakti* of the *Brahma*, hence, she too, acquired the Supreme status.

Her worship is prevalent in two forms viz., the dynamic or ferocious and benign or beneficent form. In the benign form she is differently called Bhavānī, Vijayā, Devī, Umā, Gaurī etc., and is beautiful with human-like pleasant appearance, whereas in her dynamic aspect she is described as a very ferocious goddess having a terrific countenance. In this form, she is popularly called Satī, Kapālinī, Kālī, Cāmuṇḍā, though later on, all her forms, in course of time, became fused into a single goddess, as consort of Śiva, Rudra who himself is the personification of the *Tāmasika Guṇas*.

Among all the emanations of *Ambikā*, two became very popular in the sculptural representations. One was *Mahiṣamardinī*

Durgā and the other was Cāmuṇḍā. The severe countenance of Cāmuṇḍā is the most dire and terrific one. She is worshipped as one of the *Saptamātṛkās* or as one of the 64 *Yoginīs*. However, we have numerous examples of her being dealt with, independently. In the lexicons such as the *Śabdakalpadruma* we read that Cāmuṇḍā is associated with the killing of the demons Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa. In the *Hindu Dharma Kośa, Cāmuṇḍā* is referred to as one of the names of the wife of Lord Śiva (Rudra) and holds a prestigious position in religious practices. She can be seen to the left of Śiva in the *Ardhanārīśvara* form.

In the Puranic literature, we get a very vivid picture of the origin of this goddess. The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* which is held as one of the early *Purāṇas* and was edited in the present form in the Gupta period or perhaps sometimes later, consists of one complete book containing thirteen chapters and named *Durgā Saptaśatī* and *Devī Māhātmya*. The *Devī Māhātmya* is an elaboration of the concept of the *Devī* of the Vedic doctrine, of an all powerful goddess of Supreme transcendence as propounded in the *Āmbriṇī Sūkta* and the *Dākṣyāyaṇī Sūkta*. The *Saptaśatī* speaks of the goddess Caṇḍī, who represents a consolidated idea of the different aspects of the divine truth as divine power.

The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* narrates the origin of this goddess under different names. She is *Yoganidrā, Yogamāyā*. She is the one who induces Viṣṇu to sleep. In an episode in the very first chapter of the *Durgā Saptaśatī*, she is eulogised and invoked by Brahmā. When the world was going through the process of dissolution, it is then that Lord Viṣṇu., with the aid of *Yoganidrā* was fast asleep. Then out of his ear wax emerged two dreadful demons, Madhu and Kaiṭabha, who were adamant to kill Brahmā, who was seated on the lotus seat that came out of the navel of Viṣṇu. He invoked the goddess *Yoganidrā*, who is the presiding goddess of *Tamoguṇa*, to awaken the great Lord so that he might kill these two demons. Then came forth the goddess from the body of Viṣṇu, thus awakening him, who, later, put an end to the two demons.

This episode of the origin of this 'Unborn' goddess is picturesquely portrayed in a panel in the temple of Tigawa (M. P.), belonging to the 5th century A. D. This panel shows the emergence of the goddess from Viṣṇu, who lies down at rest on his snake bed. Here the goddess Cāmuṇḍā as *Yoganidrā* is shown in a dancing pose. She is represented as ten-armed deity, and holds a bow, a shield, a *Muṇḍa* from which blood is dripping, a *Khaṭvāṅga*, a *Śūla*, a shield, a *Daṇḍa*, skull-cup; the uppermost hand is on the chin in a typical pose and one hand is broken. Her bulging eyes and lolling tongue add to her terrific appearance. Her ematiated figure is adorned with a long necklace of bones, and *Kuṇḍalas* in ears. The lower tier of this panel shows Lord Viṣṇu lying on his *Śeṣa Śayyā*, with a lotus coming out of his navel on which Brahmā is seated.

In the second chapter of the *Durgā Sāptaśatī* the goddess once again emerges from the accumulated fury not only of Viṣṇu, Śiva and Brahmā, but also of many other gods of the Brahmanic pantheon. This episode of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* continued to be a source of inspiration for the sculptors as is proved by the icons of the later centuries. The Supreme Goddess was once again invoked by the gods, for her assistance against the demons Śumbha and Niśumbha who had become notoriously powerful and had ousted the gods from their possessions.

Thereupon, goddess Ambikā sprang from the body *Kośa* of the Supreme goddess Pārvatī and assumed a dazzingly beautiful form and, henceforth, Ambikā, was also known as Kauśikī. After Kauśikī had emerged from the *Kośa* of Pārvatī the latter's complexion turned dark and that is why she came to be known as Kālikā. Therefore, Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, the two servants of Śumbha and Niśumbha reported to their masters about this beautiful manifestation. Śumbha struck with the beauty of the goddess, resolved to possess her, and sent emissaries to the goddess, to persuade her to become his mistress. The goddess, thus, approached, scoffingly replied that, she would accept only

him as her husband who would be a match for her in strength and would conquer her in battle. Śumbha, thereupon, ordered Dhūmralocana, his commander-in-chief to seize the goddess by force. But he was speedily reduced by her to ashes. On this Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa were ordered to go and seize the goddess.

The sight of Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa greatly infuriated the goddess. From her brow contracted by frowns suddenly sprang forth a goddess Kālī, black and scowling, with drawn sword and lasso, holding a mace (*Khaṭvāṅga*), wearing a necklace of skulls, clothed in a tiger skin, grim with ematiation, mouth hideously distorted and the tongue protruding out, her eyes were red and sunken and she started a terrible uproar that filled the quarters. This grim goddess began to swallow elephants with riders and all the chariots with horses and occupants. Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa were quickly worsted. The goddess picked up the heads of Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa and presented them to her originator, Kauśikī, who bestowed on her the epithet of Cāmuṇḍā in recognition of her achievement "Thou shalt be known in the world as Cāmuṇḍā." In another episode presented in the eighth chapter of the *Saptaśatī*, goddess Cāmuṇḍā, helped Ambikā and other mother goddesses who were the *Śaktis* of different gods, in killing the demon Raktabīja, as every drop of blood of this demon (*Asura*) created a new one as soon as it fell on earth. Goddess Cāmuṇḍā drank all the blood and prevented it from falling to the ground, thus killing him.

The eleventh chapter of the *Saptaśatī* further states that she incarnated in the horrifying form of 'Raktadantikā' and slew and devoured the demons of the *Vipracitti* lineage and her teeth became red like the inside of a pomegranate and she came to be known as Rakta Cāmuṇḍā and Yogeśvarī. This goddess is believed to be permeating throughout the movable and immovable objects of the universe; her worshippers are supposed to attain this extraordinary power of permeating the whole universe. This goddess carries in her hands the *Khaḍga*, *Mūsala*, *Hala* and a *Pātra*.

The *Matsya Purāṇa* also equates Cāmuṇḍā with Yogeśvarī

and states that each drop of blood that fell from the body of Raktabīja was drunk by Cāmuṇḍā alone. Again in the sixteenth chapter of the same text, Cāmuṇḍā is stated to have killed the demon Ruru. Lord Rudra addresses her with the epithets of Kālī, Karālī, Kālarātri and Manojavā. She is an emanation of Raudrī who was performing penances on the Nīlagiri mountains. From the *Varāha Purāṇa*, we come to know that Yogeśvarī sprang from the mouth of Śiva and assisted the latter against Andhakāsura. Goddess Yogeśvarī and Cāmuṇḍā appear to have been born under similar circumstances, perform similar functions and are iconographically almost identical. They possess characteristics which are also to be seen in 'Śuṣkarevatī', an ogress, whom Viṣṇu creates to drink up the blood of Andhakāsura. Śuṣkarevatī, thus, appears to be no other than goddess Yogeśvarī mentioned in the *Varāha Purāṇa*. Śuṣkarevatī is also called Kālī and may as well be equated with Cāmuṇḍā, for according to the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, this goddess Cāmuṇḍā is but a subsequent form of Kālī.

We get another mythological account in the *Varāha Purāṇa* regarding the origin of Cāmuṇḍā, referring to her combat with Ruru, the demon king who pursued the *Devas* and the latter tried to secure help from goddess Raudrī (*Kālarātri*). When she laughed, goddesses of strange forms, emanated from her mouth. These were all ferocious, with expansive breasts, holding noose, goad, trident, bow and arrows. Goddess Kālarātri struck at Ruru with her trident and his trunk (*Carma*) and head (*Muṇḍa*) got separated from each other and thus she came to be known as Cāmuṇḍā. Lord Rudra praises her as Kālī, Karālī, Cāmuṇḍā and Kālarātri. Rudra calls her the snatcher of all beings; fierce; omniscient; auspicious; pure; three-eyed, the great illusion, the great beginning, benevolent, cause of growth, black-coloured, one who obliterated all the sins, having a frightening appearance and a flaming mouth; sharp teeth, sitting in a hundred vehicles, sitting on the dead and striking terror. The days of *Aṣṭamī, Navamī* and *Caturdaśī* are auspicious to her and she bestows boons on her worshippers and those who recite her *Stotras*.

In the *Devī Purāṇa*, Cāmuṇḍā is conceived primarily as a war goddess. She is the primordial energy and Śiva herself. She saved the life of Lord Viṣṇu from the wrath of *Mahāmuni Kālāgnirudra*. She is the creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe, the universal mother and resides in cremation grounds. The text praises her by different names as Nārāyaṇī, Tārā, Śvetā, Śivā, Gaurī, Carcikā, Umā, Ambikā, Cāmuṇḍā and Nandā. The great goddess assumes the form of Cāmuṇḍā and becomes the champion of gods to destroy a demon, named Ruru. Though she has a black colour and is smeared with vermilion, yet, she has a radiating beauty.

Cāmuṇḍā is referred to as a *Mātṛkā* in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*. She has a red complexion, sits on a *Pręta*, has an ematiated body, protruding teeth, has ten arms holding a *Mūsala*, *Cakra*, *Bāṇa*, *Aṅkuśa*, *Khaḍga*, *Ḍhāla*, *Pāśa*, *Dhanus Daṇḍa* and *Kuṭhāra*.

In the *Kālikā Purāṇa* this goddess is said to be four-armed and is like a blue lotus. In the *Agni Purāṇa*, Cāmuṇḍā has been described as a skeletol and ematiated figure who is dressed in a tiger skin and has a skull-cup in her hand. The *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, too, describes her as a very terrible goddess who has fearful eyes, is seated on a corpse, holds a skull-cup, bell, *Damarū* and small bells in her hands, wears an elephant hide and a necklace of skulls.

From the above discussion we can safely arrive at a conclusion that these *Purāṇas* were composed at a phase when the experimental stage was over and the various concepts had gradually started assuming a prescribed final form which determined to a large extent the iconographic features of various deities and Cāmuṇḍā was one of the popular emanations of the Devī, who in later centuries established her own cult in the Tantric pantheon and was invoked for protection against challenges of aggression. She has a wandering nature and is considered as the protectress of all the ten quarters "दश दिशो रक्षेच्चामुण्डा शववाहना".

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Durgā—the Supreme Female Reality

—*Prof. D. Vaidyanathan*

ॐ सर्व चैतन्यरूपां आद्यां विद्यां च धीमहि बुद्धिं यो नः प्रचोदयात्।

Introduction—

Religion without philosophy is superstition. Philosophy without religion is mere theory. And nowhere is the combination of these two so perfect and lasting as in the great religion of Hinduism.

The gods of Hinduism: The holy Trinity—

This is formed of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva alongwith their consorts—Sarasvatī, Lakṣmī and Pārvatī respectively. Of these, Brahmā creates the world, Viṣṇu sustains it and Śiva destroys it; hence the cyclic order of creation, preservation and destruction.

The Guṇas—

Then there are the three *Guṇas—Sattvaguṇa*, *Rajoguṇa* and *Tamoguṇa*; and the three deities of the trinity correspond to these *Guṇas* i. e., Viṣṇu represents *Sattva*—the power of existence and preservation; Śiva represents *Tamas*—the power of annihilation; and Brahmā who stands in between, represents *Rajas*.

Śiva—

He is the third deity of the trinity. He has two aspects—the mild and the terrible. He is responsible for the dissolution of the universe. He has three eyes and four hands—the upper ones each with a trident and a drum and the lower ones posing the *Varada* and *Abhaya Mudrās*. On the head is a crown of matted hair from which flows Gaṅgā. Gaṇeśa and Kumāra are his two sons. His *Śakti* is represented by his consort Pārvatī. She is also known as Durgā.

Like her consort, Pārvatī too has two aspects—the mild and the terrible. As Pārvatī, she represents the mild aspect; and in

this aspect, she is usually shown with Śiva in which form, she has only two hands—the right one with a blue lotus and the left one hanging down the side; and when shown alone, she has four hands—the upper two holding red and blue lotuses and the lower two exhibiting the *Varada* and *Abhaya Mudrās*.

Śiva the mild is also known as Rudra the terrible; and Pārvatī being his consort, she too has her terrible aspects; hence her name Durgā the terrible.

The *Purāṇas* describe her as the sister of Viṣṇu (*Padmanābha Sahodarī*) and in one of the forms of Śiva—*Ardhanārīśvara*, she forms the left half.

Many Aspects of Pārvatī—

According to *Durgā Saptaśatī*, when Pārvatī in Kauśikī Durgā aspect was fighting the demon Raktabīja, she manifested herself into seven forms—the *Saptamātās* and they are the Brāhmī, Māheśvarī, Kaumārī, Vaiṣṇavī, Vārāhī, Nārasiṁhī and Indrāṇī. As their names indicate, they are the *Śaktis* of Brahmā, Īśvara, Kumāra, Viṣṇu, Varāha, Narasiṁha and Indra respectively. In this context, it may be mentioned that Pārvatī manifested herself as Kauśikī Durgā and who herself became Kālī after this manifestation.

Kālī—

She is an embodiment of *Tamas*. She is in the form of a dark nude woman wearing an apron of human hands and with a garland of fifty human heads. Her luxuriant hair is completely dishevelled. She has three eyes and four hands. In the upper hands, she is holding a freshly severed human head and the sword used in the carnage; and the lower hands are in the *Varada* and *Abhaya Mudrās*. Her face is red and the tongue protruding.

Lalitā—

This is another aspect of Pārvatī; also called as Lalitā Tripurasundarī. She is more worshipped in South India. *Lalitā Sahasranāma* and *Triśatī* are associated with Lalitā; also the *Śrī Cakra*—her emblem in which form only she is worshipped

in most of the Devī temples in the South.

If Durgā and Kālī represent the two powerful aspects of Devī meaning Pārvatī, Lalitā represents the aspect of beauty; i.e., as extremely beautiful with a refined form of worship—a unique feature indeed.

Lalitā is usually depicted as light red in colour and of bewitching beauty. She has four hands, the upper ones holding arrows and a bow of sugarcane and the lower ones the *Aṅkuśa* and the *Pāśa*; and in the *Śrī Cakra*, the dot at the centre represents the combination of Śiva and Śakti—*Śivaśakti*.

More about Durgā—

Durgā simply means one who is difficult to approach; also difficult to know—she being the personification of the totality of the powers of the Gods; hence called the Mother of the universe—the Supreme Mother. She is also the most widely worshipped aspect of *Śakti—Ādiparāśakti*.

Images of Durgā can have four, eight, eighteen or even twenty hands. The eyes are usually three. The hair is dressed up forming a crown. She is gorgeously dressed with red cloth and bedecked with many ornaments. In her hands are commonly seen conch, discus, trident, bow, arrow, sword, dagger, shield, rosary and bell. She is seen standing on a red lotus or riding a lion; hence her name *Siṁhavāhinī*.

Note—

Purāṇa Devībhāgavatam has been dedicated to her; and in a concise form is the *Devī Māhātmyam* dealing with the glory of the Mother. It is also known as *Durgāsaptaśatī*. It is formed of thirteen chapters with 700 *Ślokas*. Of this, the first ten deal with the fight between Devī and the nine *Asuras*—Madhu, Kaiṭabha, Mahiṣāsura, Śumbha, Niśumbha, Dhūmralocana, Caṇḍa, Muṇḍa and Raktabīja and the last three deal with the hymn to Nārāyaṇī, merits of reading the book and the conclusion of the story.

After Durgā and before Lalitā, comes Mahiṣāsuramardinī. She took shape as a result of the pooling together of the powers

of all gods, who felt oppressed by the demon Mahiṣāsura—one of the nine demons. The trinity got much annoyed on hearing the misdeeds of Mahiṣāsura and the Devī was born out of their wrath, followed by the wrath of the lesser divinities. Besides, the exact duplicates of their weapons, they formed her weapons too. Thus armed and riding on a fierce lion, she fought with the demon and destroyed him alongwith his vast army.

Likewise, Devī fought with the other eight demons and everything was over with the first ten chapters of *Devīmāhātmyam.* She thus established the fact that she is the Supreme truth or Supreme Female Reality described in all scriptural works.

Her other manifestations are—Vindhyavāsinī (*Vindhyācalanivāsinī*) who escaped from the killer hands of Kaṁsa—the great enemy of Lord Kṛṣṇa and whose uncle he was; Raktadantā armed with red teeth, Śatākṣī with one hundred eyes, Durgamā, Bhīmā and Bhraramba to mention a few other demons. And because of these exploits, Devī became known as Mahākālī, Mahālakṣmī and Mahāsarasvatī—looked upon as the three major manifestations of one Supreme power Māheśvarī and this is according to the three *Guṇas* (*Tamas*, *Rajas* and *Sattva* respectively).

Mahākālī—

She has ten faces and ten feet. She is deep blue in colour bedecked with a variety of ornaments; and with ten hands each one armed with weapons and objects. She is the personification of *Mahā Māyā*—the mysterious power of Lord Viṣṇu and who in this context, creates, sustains and annihilates everything from the subtlest to the grossest.

Mahālakṣmī—

She has eighteen hands, each one armed with a variety of weapons including discus *Sudarśana*. She is red in colour and is looked upon as being born out of the combined wrath and powers of all the gods to fight the evil forces; and it is she who destroyed Mahiṣāsura (who had been terrorising the three worlds and made the lives of people so miserable) by cutting

his head off. Soon all the *Devas* headed by Indra in front came in a large procession and extolled Nārāyaṇī—the power of Lord Nārāyaṇa the Supreme being with divine hymns known as *Nārāyaṇī Stuti* forming the eleventh chapter of *Devī Māhātmyam*.

Mahā Sarasvatī—

She is bright like the autumn moon. She has eight hands each holding a weapon and object. It is she who has manifested out of the forehead of Devī; hence known as Kauśikī Durgā mentioned earlier; and who herself became Kālī the fierce dark one and who only killed Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa by beheading them; and hence her name Cāmuṇḍeśvarī; and it is she who also vanquished the other demons—Raktabīja, Niśumbha, Śumbha—looked upon as the Lord of the demons.

Some other aspects of Pārvatī/Durgā Parameśvarī—

Annapūrṇeśvarī the possessor and giver of food; Aparājitā the invincible, Bālā the child always nine years old, Bhadrākṣī who destroyed Dakṣa's sacrifice, Bhūtamātā the mother of goblins forming her retinue, Cāmuṇḍeśvarī—same as Kālī, Indrākṣī whose eyes are similar to Indra's, Kāmeśvarī the consort of Kāmeśvara who is Śiva himself, Kātyāyanī the totality of the powers of the Hindu trinity, Manonmanī—one who lifts the mind up the highest state of *Yoga*, Śivadūtī, who sent her consort Śiva himself as a messenger to Śumbha and Niśumbha, Rājarājeśvarī who rules over even the king of kings. She is looked upon as the highest manifestation of Pārvatī and unique by herself; Gāyatrī, Sāvitrī and Sarasvatī—the three presiding deities of the famous *Gāyatrī Mantra* chanted three times a day—morning before the sun rises, noon and evening before the sunset respectively; and these to mention only a few; and I conclude—

सर्वमङ्गलमाङ्गल्ये शिवे सर्वार्थसाधिके।
शरण्ये त्र्यम्बके गौरि नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते॥

Pañca Kanyā

In the Hindu theology certain great persons—males and females both—are known to be *Puṇyaśloka* (whose name is capable of bestowing virtue and auspicious result). Every Hindu feels that it is a routine duty to remember and mention these names immediately after getting up from the deep slumber. There are certain gods, certain goddesses, certain persons like Nala, Yudhiṣṭhira, Hanumān and Vibhīṣaṇa etc., etc. Likewise there are five ladies whose names are worth remembering early in the morning by the people desirous of their ultimate good. They are—

अहल्या द्रौपदी तारा कुन्ती मन्दोदरी तथा।
पञ्चकन्याः स्मरेन्नित्यं महापातक नाशनम्॥

(*Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* III. 7. 219)

Some scholars are of the opinion that *Pañca Kanyā* should be read as 'पंचकं ना'. In that case it will mean that a man, *Nā* should remember these five female names. Their opinion is based on the assumption that the word *Kanyā* means an unmarried girl—a virgin. But this assumption seems to be biased and fallacious. The word *Nā* is singular and masculine. So to be most accurate in the meaning, only a male person can get rid of his sins. But what about the females? Will they not be redeemed of their sins or they should not remember these names? Why only masculine singular? Is it because they were all married and mothers too? But in the *Purāṇas* we find so many references that ladies even after their sexual indulgences kept the virginity preserved. Kuntī herself was an example of the type. Even after the birth of Karṇa she was a virgin and that too, in the real

sense of the term. In *Paurāṇika Koṣa* it is mentioned quite unambiguously that these five ladies even after their marriages are supposed to be *Kanyās*. In the *Saṅkṣipta Hindī Śabda Sāgara* by Nāgarī Pracāriṇī Sabhā, Varanasi, in the meaning of *Pañcakanyā* it is given— "....विवाह आदि करने पर भी जिनका कौमार्य अखण्डित माना गया है।" (Even after the marriage their virginity was preserved and quite unbroken). Eventhough a lot can be said in the favour of their merits—secular and spiritual both yet it is difficult to pin-point the quality which caused them to be regarded as *Kanyās*. What is more amazing and startling is the fact that everyone of them was visited by more than one—celestial or terrestrial persons. Their chastity and fidelity can be appreciated even by the rational mind today. Particularly in those days it had full social sanction to produce children with the help of celestial deities. Not only this but *Niyoga* even was socially permissible while keeping the chastity perfect. Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Vidura and Pāṇḍu were the children of the same type. We do not find any reference in the *Mahābhārata* or the *Purāṇas* that any contemporary authoritative person might have raised a finger of objection. So it seems that a definition of these words in those days was somewhat different from how we take them today. If we adjust our mind accordingly, it may not appear very difficult to understand the situation. Although there were many other ladies whose virginity remained unbroken but on account of their merit the society accepted only these five female names to be remembered early in the morning. Now let us cultivate an acquaintance with these five separately.

Ahalyā—

According to *Śrīmad Bhāgavata*, Ahalyā was the daughter of Mudgala. She was married to Gautama. She gave birth to a son named Śatānanda. Divodāsa was her brother (*Bhāgavata* IX. 21. 34).

In *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* she is the grand daughter of Mudgala. Her father was Bṛhadaśva, the son of Mudgala. *Brahma Purāṇa* gives entirely different version. Brahmā created Ahalyā and handed

over to Gautama to bring her up till her marriageable age. When she reached that age and was attractively youthful, many gods like Indra, Agni and Varuṇa were desirous of having her. Then Brahmā decided to put a condition for the eligibility of the candidature. He declared—"One who completes the circumambulation of the planet earth earliest, will be eligible for a bridegroom." The desirous deities proceeded on their errand but the sage Gautama made the circumambulation of Kāmadhenu and Lord Śiva. Brahmā was pleased with his scriptural wisdom and gave Ahalyā to him. All others compromised with their fate but Indra did not. He impersonated Gautama and deceiving Ahalyā, had sexual intercourse with her while Gautama was absent from the hermitage. In the meantime Gautama came and knew everything. He hurled a curse on both. With the result Ahalyā became a dry river and Indra had one thousand spots in the shape of vagina. When Indra sincerely repented, prayed and requested, the curse was slightly modified. Ahalyā was given assurance that when she meets Gautamī Gaṅgā she will regain her original form and the one thousand vaginal spots of Indra were converted into eyes.

According to *Matsya Purāṇa* she became a rock and was liberated when she got the dust of Śrī Rāma's feet. Tulasīdāsa in his *Rāmacaritamānasa* gives more or less the same version.

If we take the word Ahalyā, the word may literally mean an uncultivable land (न हल्या=अहल्या) meaning a land which cannot be ploughed.

Draupadī—

Draupadī is well-known and famous character of *Mahābhārata*. Everybody knows about her the things which are up and up. But there are certain things which are beyond the common knowledge. For example *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* gives a different version of the origin of *Pāṇḍavas*. According to *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* all the five *Pāṇḍava* brothers were born as a fraction of Indra and they were representatives of Indra only. The *Purāṇa* says that very often

there was a war between gods and demons and it was customary with the gods to incarnate themselves on the earth in the human form. It was really the splendour of Indra which Dharmarāja established in the womb of Kuntī. Then again the wind-god put the same essence from Indra in the womb of Kuntī and Bhīma was born. Indra incarnated himself in the form of Arjuna with the half of his potency. Then Aśvinī Kumāras put the same potency of Indra in the womb of Mādrī and the twin brothers Nakula and Sahadeva took birth from Mādrī. So, really speaking, all the five brothers were one and the same and Draupadī who was incarnation of Śacī, was married only to Indra and nobody else. According to this *Purāṇa* Kuntī had all the five sons from Indra only. This episode of *Markaṇḍeya Purāṇa* whitewashes all the blemishes of Draupadī that she was the wife of five husbands.

Tārā—

About Tārā we know very little. One can ask a very legible question which Tārā has been referred to, whether she was the wife of Bṛhaspati who willingly lived with Candramā and gave birth to Budha or the wife of Vālī who after his demise married Sugrīva his younger brother. Generally in this particular context of *Pañca Kanyās* we count the latter one in the list of the five virtuous names. We do not find much in *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* about Tārā and why her name is considered to be so pious. We do not know for certain that she was even a devotee of high order. She was the daughter of Suṣeṇa and was married to Vālī. She gave birth to Aṅgada from Vālī. She was a shrewd lady. She handled skilfully the wrath of Lakṣmaṇa and subsided his anger. She also motivated Sugrīva to do his duty as a friend. In the end she is supposed to have gone to *Vaikuṇṭha*.

Kuntī—

Kuntī was the daughter of Śūrasena from Yadu dynasty. She was the sister of Vasudeva. Her paternal uncle Kuntibhoja had no issue, so he adopted her as his daughter. Her former name was Pṛthā, but now she became Kuntī after the name of Kuntibhoja. While she was a kid, she served the sage Durvāsā

with great attention for a considerably long period. Durvāsā was extremely pleased with her. At the time of departure from the palace he gave her a *Mantra* from *Atharvaveda* that was capable of invoking any deity she chose to invite. Out of curiosity and to test the power of the said *Mantra* one day she invoked the sungod and he appeared in person before her. Eventhough she did not want it yet she was compelled to give birth to Karṇa as the outcome of this meeting of the two. Due to the grace of sungod her virginity was not at all affected. Afterwards she was married to Pāṇḍu of Hastināpura and then gave birth to three sons—Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma and Arjuna. She was a unique lady having no match to her. For the whole of her life she successfully walked on the tight rope of religiousness and righteousness. We find Kuntī as the only lady who did not nourish any ill-feeling against even Duryodhana, Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī who deserved it. In the end of her life she followed Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Gāndhārī to the forest when they left Hastināpura to attain *Paramārtha*. Throughout her life she faced and underwent through the hurricane of calamitous incidents but she was never disheartened and never gave up the *Dharma*.

Mandodarī—

According to some sources Mandodarī was an offspring of the demon Maya and the *Apsarā* Rambhā whom he snatched by force from the paradise of Indra. According to some other sources it was Swayaṁprabhā who gave birth to Mandodarī. Mandodarī was married to Rāvaṇa, the ogre king of Lanka. According to literature available on *Rāmakathā* we find a glaring contrast between her and Rāvaṇa. She appears in *Rāmāyaṇa* as an exceptionally chaste lady. Her fidelity to her husband was unquestionable and beyond doubt. But at the same time she was aware of the godhood of Rāma so, she always advised Rāvaṇa to make a compromise with Rāma and surrender Sītā to him and save the ogre dynasty and the kingdom of Lanka. Of course we all know that she dismally failed and in the end committed *Satī* with the dead body of Rāvaṇa.

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The Analysis of Lakṣmī Tattva

—*P. Ramachandrachar*

General Concept—

Mahālakṣmī or Śrī Devī is commonly understood as—

(1) Aiśvarya Lakṣmī—Goddess of wealth
(2) Jayalakṣmī—Goddess of victory or success
(3) Dhānya Lakṣmī—Goddess of foodgrains
(4) Santāna Lakṣmī—Goddess of progeny
(5) Vidyā Lakṣmī—Goddess of knowledge
(6) Śrī Lakṣmī—Goddess of brilliance
(7) Ārogya Lakṣmī—Goddess of health
(8) Saundarya Lakṣmī—Goddess of beauty

Besides; Her special presence is recognised in—

(1) Gaja Lakṣmī—Goddess of elephant
(2) Gau Lakṣmī—The goddess in cow (especially in cow-dung)
(3) Vṛndāvana Lakṣmī—In Tulasī plant (the holy basil)

Mythological Concept—

(1) She is the consort of Lord Viṣṇu, the protector and one of the members of top trinity.

(2) Daughter of the ocean, born while churning the ocean for ambrosia (*Amṛta*).

(3) Having the colour of gold; sitting or standing on a golden lotus (Kanaka Lakṣmī).

(4) She also incarnates whenever her husband Nārāyaṇa assumes *Avatāra* in the world except when (1) The *Avatāra* is of a very short period—(i) *Matsya* (at the time of dissolution), (ii) *Kūrma* etc. (iii) When the *Avatāra* is mostly for preaching, penance and becoming a saint or a Saṁnyāsī i.e., (1) Vedavyāsa (2) Kapila (3) Datta (4) Paraśurāma etc.

(5) Her name precedes whenever her husband's name is uttered or remembered. Example—Śrī Rāma—like that.

Lakṣmī Devī during the time of final dissolution—

At the end of *Brāhma Kalpa*; there is final dissolution of the entire physical universe. It is sucked into the black hole of Viṣṇu's navel. Nothing remains except the endless ocean and "darkness hidden in darkness" which engulfs every being also.

This ocean and the darkness are the *Tāmasika* aspect of Lakṣmī. It is called as *Durgā Rūpa* (different from that of Pārvatī—the consort of Śiva). Then Śrī Hari takes the form of a brilliant baby with an azure hue and lies playing on a leaf of banian. He holds His big toe in one hand and puts it in His mouth. Thousands of poetic devotees have described this form in rapture. Here the banian leaf is another form of Lakṣmī of *Rājasika* aspect called Bhūdevī (primordial matter that takes the form of heavenly bodies).

Then Lakṣmī assumes the form of *Kaustubha* gem and shines on the breast of the Supreme child. This is the *Sāttvika* aspect of Lakṣmī called Śrī Devī, further she serves Nārāyaṇa there in the form of an umbrella, *Cāmara* (a fan of silken hair); bed and fan. At that time even '*Śeṣa*' the serpent god who forms the bed of Nārāyaṇa in the ocean of milk is not found. That comes at the beginning of next cycle of creation. That will be a contact border place between the physical universe and the illimitable uncomprehensible beyond (*Tripāda Vibhūti*). It is Supernatural. Even Lakṣmī is unable to comprehend it.

Avatāra of Lakṣmī—

She is the wife of Nārāyaṇa who assumes *Caturvyūha Rūpas* (four aspects indicate—(1) Omnipresence (Vāsudeva), (2) Development (Pradyumna), (3) Gravitation (Saṅkarṣaṇa), (4) Indestructible or unchecked (Aniruddha). Then Lakṣmī assumes the dynamic forms of these aspects as follows—

(1)Nārāyaṇa—Mahālakṣmī (original).

(2) Vāsudeva—Māyādevī

(3) Pradyumna—Kṛtī Devī
(4) Saṅkarṣaṇa—Jaya Devī
(5) Aniruddha—Śāntā Devī

During the living creation—(1) Śrī Rāma—Sītā Devī (2) Śrī Kṛṣṇa—Rukmiṇī Devī, Satyabhāmā and having her presence in a special way in other wives of Kṛṣṇa.

(3) Veṅkaṭeśa—Padmāvatī Devī

She is said to be the shadow form of Sītā. Rāvaṇa did not kidnap Sītā (because the couple is inseparable). The shadow remained in the cottage during the absence of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa; which Rāvaṇa kidnapped. At the end of war the shadow Sītā disappeared in the fire of test and the real Sītā appeared. As per request of Sītā; Rāma promised to marry (Vedavatī) the shadow Sītā in *Kaliyuga*. She was born as the daughter of Ākāśa Rāja and Śrī Rāma becoming Lord Veṅkaṭeśa, married her.

According to *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa*, Vedavatī was born as daughter to the king Ambarīṣa and at the end had become Vedavatī whom Rāvaṇa wanted to kidnap. She cursed him that she would be the cause of his destruction and disappeared in the sacrificial fire-pit. It is said that Sītā killed the thousand-headed Rāvaṇa when even Rāma failed to kill him. Different versions and reasons are given for the birth of Sītā in different *Purāṇas* and *Rāmāyaṇas*. They may be explained as taking place in different *Yugas*.

.Mahālakṣmī is also regarded as *Dakṣiṇā*—gift of gold or wealth given to holy people for performing religious rites and ceremonies. Without *Dakṣiṇā* every religious rite becomes valueless.

Lakṣmī Devī in Bhagavadgītā—

In the seventh chapter of *Bhagavadgītā*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa first enumerates the aspects of lower *Prakṛti* which are purely material in nature.

अपरेयमितस्त्वन्यां प्रकृतिं विद्धि मे पराम्।
जीवभूतां महाबाहो ययेदं धार्यते जगत्॥

(VII. 5)

"The eightfold nature described above is only my lower aspect. But O mighty-armed Arjuna; there is another aspect which is superior to this which is the sustainer of all the souls and supports the entire universe."

And what is this Superior *Prakṛti* ? Deviating from other commentators Śrī Madhvācārya explains it in his *Gītā Bhāṣya.*

जीवभूता श्रीः जीवानां प्राण धारिणी।
चिद्रूपभूता सर्वदा सती एतन्महाभूतं इति श्रुतेः॥

"Sustainer of souls is Śrī Lakṣmī Devī. She pervades the bodies and maintains life. She herself has a body of knowledge and bliss. Her body is eternal;....... without any kind of destruction. She is the dearest to Śrī Hari—infinitely superior to Brahmā and other Gods."

Again in chapter 12 Arjuna questions Śrī Kṛṣna, "Some worship Your *Saguṇa* form (with shapes and attributes and some others, your *Avyakta* form (*Nirguṇa* or attributeless). Who among these are better knowers of *Yoga*?"

For this the gist of Madhva's *Gītā Bhāṣya* and *Gītā Tātparya* is this—*Avyakta* means Mahālakṣmī, she is superior to Brahmā.

(महतः परम्) उपास्यतां श्रियमव्यक्त संज्ञां भक्त्या।
मर्त्यो मुच्यते सर्ववंधैरिति सामवेदे अग्निवेश्य शाखायाम्॥

A well-qualified devotee worships Lakṣmī called *Avyakta* and gets released from the bondage of creation.

So in his opinion *Avyakta* is *Prakṛti* and *Paramātmā* is full of auspicious attributes which are not of *Prakṛti (Nārāyaṇāya Paripūrṇaguṇārṇavāya).*

The answer of Kṛṣṇa for Arjuna's querry is that it is very difficult to please Lakṣmī (who also can bestow *Mokṣa* by the grace of Śrī Hari) and then through her husband Viṣṇu to get final emancipation.

Again in chapter XIV Śrī Kṛṣṇa says—

मम योनिर्महद्ब्रह्म तस्मिन्गर्भं दधाम्यहम्।
संभवः सर्वभूतानां ततो भवति भारत॥

"Arjuna, *Mahad Brahma* is my *Yoni* (wife Lakṣmī). I impregnate her, from this all beings are created."Madhva says that according to *Śabda Nirṇaya*, '*Yoni*' means 'wife'.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa continues, Arjuna, in all the *Yonis* (where the souls take bodies) the *Brahma* is *Mahad Yoni* (Lakṣmī) and I am the seeding father.

Again in the XV chapter Śrī Kṛṣṇa says—

द्वाविमौ पुरुषौ लोके क्षरश्चाक्षर एव च।
क्षरः सर्वाणि भूतानि कूटस्थोऽक्षर उच्यते॥

(16)

Arjuna, in this world there are two kinds of *Puruṣas* (souls who reside in the body). One is *Kṣara* (destructible) and the other is *Akṣara* (which is indestructible). All these beings whose bodies perish are called *Kṣaras* and that which is the primordial matter (*Kūṭastha*) is *Akṣara*.

ब्रह्मरुद्रादयः सर्वे शरीरक्षरणात् क्षराः।
श्रीरक्षरात्मेत्युदिता नित्या चिद्देहका यतः॥.........

Madhva says that Brahmā, Rudra etc., are called *Kṣaras* because their bodies disintegrate, but Lakṣmī has a spiritual body which is eternal. She is the master guide of all animate and inanimate creatures.

Puruṣottama is Nārāyaṇa.

Śrī Lakṣmī in Vedas (Āgama Śrī)—

She is the guardian deity of *Vedas*. Śrī Sukta tells her glory—

अहं रुद्रेमिर्वसुभिश्चराऽम्यहमादित्यैरुत विश्वदेवैः।
अहं मित्रा वरुणोभाऽविभऽर्म्यह मिंद्राग्नि अहमश्विनोभा॥

She says—I alongwith eleven *Rudras*, eight *Vasus*, eleven *Ādityas* (except Viṣṇu) and *Viśvedevas* move......

यं कामये तं तमग्रं कृणोमि तं ब्रह्माणं तमृषीं तं सुमेद्या।

Whomever I want, I make him Rudra, Brahmā, *Ṛṣis,* and the learned (*Ṛgveda* X. 125. 145).

The deities mentioned above are also explained in terms of universal forces—

श्रियं वसाना अमृतत्व मायन् भवति.......।

Those who adore Lakṣmī get emancipated ''अनाद्यनंतं महत: परं ध्रुवं।'' without beginning or end she is superior to *Mahat* (*Brahma*) and unchanging from this glory.

The Astronomy says—"The universe is not endless but it has no limit. This can give an idea of Lakṣmī—the guardian deity of *Triguṇa* and cosmic matter in relation to Nārāyaṇa the Supreme.

Lakṣmī according to the Bhagavad Rāmānuja sect of Vaishnavism—

The essence is given—

(1) The word *Paramātmā* includes both Lakṣmī and Nārāyaṇa.

(2) She is like Paramātmā in essence.

(3) But Nārāyaṇa is absolutely independent and the freedom of Lakṣmī is by the grace of Nārāyaṇa.

(4) Her experience of bliss is equal to that of Nārāyaṇa and all the liberated souls also enjoy equal bliss.

(5) Lakṣmī forms the body of Nārāyaṇa and so also all the souls and matter as—

चराचराणि भूतानि सर्वाणि भगवद्वपुः।

But they are all spiritual and not material.

Lakṣmī in the sect of Mādhva Vaishnavism—

(1) She is infinitely superior to all the beings including Brahmā and Rudra.

(2) She is infinitely inferior to Viṣṇu.

(3) She is eternally in liberated state (नित्यमुक्ता).

(4) She is equal to Śrī Hari in the extent of time and space.

(5) She is never separated from Nārāyaṇa.

(6) She also can bestow *Mokṣa* on devotees.

(7) She is in continuous view of the most amazing, blissful and ever new qualities of Śrī Hari and experiences divine thrills every fraction of a second.

(8) She can create, protect, destroy, control, enlighten, enmesh, bind and release all beings by the grace of Śrī Hari.

(9) She flashes in the form of bliss in the hearts of devotees who retain *Satya* (Śrī Hari).

Two Historical incidents about Lakṣmī—

(1) **A. D. 1336**—Swāmī Vidyāraṇya was in penance. Two princes (Hakka Rāja and Bukka Rāja) came and prostrated before him. They told the saint that they belonged to a royal family. The country around was menaced by the enemies of *Sanātana Dharma*; and there was anarchy let loose in the country. They wanted to gather an army to combat the menace, but they could not find money so they sought Swāmījī's help. The monk asked them to come on a Friday. When they came he meditated on Goddess Lakṣmī. Then a rain of gold coins poured around a limited space, so much so that it was sufficient for the establishment of a kingdom of *Dharma*. The brothers established the great Vijayanagar empire.

(2) In the sixteenth century during the reign of Kṛṣṇadeva Rāya, monk 'Vyāsa Rāja' was the royal preceptor. He had become *Saṁnyāsī* very young directly from batchelorhood. Apart from scholarly *Saṁskṛta* works, he used to compose devotional songs in the local Kannada language. He used Kṛṣṇa as his *Aṅkita* (pen-name). One day Lord Kṛṣṇa appeared in his meditation and said—"You being a *Saṁnyāsī* have no wife, but have I not?" The sage realised his error; then changed his *Aṅkita* to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. These two incidents show the importance of Mahālakṣmī.

Let Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa be pleased.

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> The root cause of the good or bad fruits that we reap, is action. The root cause of action is inclination or motivation and our inclinations in general are guided by our house-wives. Therefore, ultimately the root-cause of our good or evil conduct is womankind.
>
> —*Rishi Bankimachandra*

Durgā—the Supreme Female Reality

—Kalyana Chowdhury

The female reality Supreme
Is Mother Durgā, Śiva's queen,
Her grace can help you to know the truth
That is obscured by the illusion's screen.

She is primal power Divine
The auspicious creative trend to begin
And also to protect with ample care
And endless beautiful cosmic scene.

In annihilation she always stores
The seeds of life with interest keen
For the cherished future genesis to come
Bestowing Her filial affection serene.

As Umā Haimavatī She proved
That against the demons gods could win
As She was installed in their hearts
To keep their spirits evergreen.

As Devī Caṇḍī She saved the world
Being worshipped by devotees time and again
Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara
Sing Her glory in celestial strain.

Śrī Rāma invoked the aid of Durgā
The ten-headed wicked Rāvaṇa to kill,
Arjuna was told by Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the war
To the mighty Mother to pray and appeal.

The superlative energy's personified source
On the lion of conscience has to remain;
Ever to beget the offspring's welfare
Her ten hands fight in directions ten.

The Position of Female Deities in Mādhva Sampradāya

—R. Sridharan

Śrī Madhva (1238—1317 A D) is one of the greatest propounder of Vedantic thoughts and Hindu theology. According to him, Super sentient being Lord Śrī Hari, sentient beings (*Jīvas*) and the world of matter (*Jaḍa*) are three eternal objects existing forever and there are eternal fivefold difference (*Pañca Bheda*) among them. According to Śrī Madhva, there are innumerable souls having innumerable intrinsic natures among themselves existing forever and there are *Sāttvika* souls, *Rājasika* souls and *Tāmasika* souls. Divine beings or deities belong to *Sāttvika* group and they are *Mukti Yogya Jīvas* (eligible for eternal liberation). Among souls also there are male souls and female souls eternally and intrinsically. Sometimes male souls can enter into the bodies of female souls in this *Saṁsārāvarta* or cycle of birth and death in this world, but female souls cannot enter into the bodies of male souls. But in *Mokṣa*, all enjoy innate bliss (*Mukti Sukha*) in their intrinsic bodies of males and females only. One's worth is determined by one's intrinsic nature only (*Svarūpa Yogyatā*) and not by sex factor. That is why, when you see the theology of Madhva, you can find a lot of female deities occupying exalted positions in divine hierarchy (*Devatā Tāratamya*). According to Śrī Madhva the deities are classified into 32 groups.

In the very first position Śrī Hari occupies the Supreme position, since He is the one and the only independent being and 'All Supreme' (*Sarvottama Devatā*). Next to him only all other divinities occupy various places according to their *Svarūpa*

and *Svabhāva* (innate form and intrinsic nature). All these are stated in various *Vedas, Itihāsas* and *Purāṇas*. A very detailed analysis of this theory cannot be gone into this small article. I shall briefly describe the positions occupied by the female deities and their descent forms (*Avatāra Rūpas*) in the divine hierarchy.

Lakṣmī—

Lakṣmī occupies the second position in *Devatā Tāratamya.* She is next to Lord Hari only. She is the divine consort of Lord Hari. She does not have material body at any point of time (*Liṅga Śarīra Rahita*). She is possessing non-material body (*Aprākṛta Śarīra*) only always as Śrī Hari. So she is *Nitya Mukta* (ever liberated). She is coeval with Lord Śrī Hari in space and time but in divine qualities, she is far far inferior to Lord Śrī Hari. That is why *Vedas* call her *Sama-Asama* (equal cum non-equal). She is inseparable from the Lord. She is *Nitya Aviyogini* (always inseparated). Whenever Lord incarnates she also incarnates. She is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent for all others except Lord. We have to worship her always in the company of her spouse Lord Śrī Hari. She has many specific forms like Dakṣiṇā, Śrī, Śānti, Bhū, Kṛti, Durgā, Jayā, Rukmiṇī, Satyabhāmā, Māyā, Kamalālayā, Sītā, Manoramā and Ambhriṇī etc.

Sarasvatī and Bhāratī—

Brahmā's wife is Sarasvatī, Vāyu's wife is Bhāratī. They occupy the fourth *Varga* or *Kakṣā* (class) in the divine hierarchy. They are equal in all respects. Sarasvatī is slightly higher to Bhāratī due to power position. They are almost like twins. They are *Vidyābhimānī Devatās* and *Buddhi Abhimānī Devatās*. They are also *Veda-Abhimānī Devatās*. They are inferior to their husbands by hundredfold in qualities. They are also *Paraśukla* like their husbands and Ramā Devī. They have no evil influence under any circumstances. They have correct knowledge on Lord Hari. Bhāratī becomes Sarasvatī in the next *Kalpa* and attains *Mokṣa*. Sarasvatī does not have any *Avatāra* in this world. She has various synonyms like *Veda Devikā*, Bhujī

Gāyatrī, Sāvitrī, *Guru* Bhakti, Śraddhā, Sukhātmikā, Brāhmī and Vāṇī. Bhāratī is known by the names of Vidyut, Śraddhā, Śrī Vidyut. She had four descent forms. She was born as Kālī,daughter of Kāśirāja and married Bhīma. She was born as Draupadī or Pāñcālī and married *Pañca Pāṇḍavas*. In fact in *Draupadī-Deha* apart from Bhāratī other deities like Śacī (Indra's wife), Śyāmalā (Yama's wife), Uṣā (Aśvinī Kumāra's wife) and Pārvatī (Śiva's wife) took shelter and so each deity joined with their *Niyata Patis* except Pārvatī (because Śiva was born as Aśvatthāmā and Aśvatthāmā remained as celebate and so Pārvatī had no male consort during that *Janma*). Bhāratī was also born as *Śiva Kanyā* in *Tretā Yuga* and died as a maiden. She was born as Indrasenā or Nalayānī and married Moudgalya *Maharṣi*. In Kali-age she was born as Candrā and died as a celebate.

After these ladies in the sixth place Kṛṣṇa's *Mahiṣīs* occupy an important place. Kṛṣṇa's six wives are Jāmbavatī, Bhadrā, Nīlā, Kālindī, Mitravindā and Lakṣmaṇā. They have *Ahaṅkāra Tattva Śarīra*. They do 39 *Kalpa Sādhanā* and in the 40th *Kalpa* become as *Ṣaṇmahiṣīs*. They reside in all *Jīvas* navel region (*Ṣaṭ Kamalā*). They are inferior to Garuḍa, Śeṣa and Rudra by five *Guṇas*. When they have *Lakṣmī Āveśa* God has union with them and they become equal to Śeṣa Deva. Jāmbavatī is slightly higher than others in position and power. In Tulasī Devī Jāmbavatī has full *Aṁśa*. They are great devotees of Lord Hari.

After these Garuḍa's wife Sauparṇī, Śeṣa's wife Vāruṇī and Rudra's wife Vāmā occupy the seventh position. They are equal in all respects. Umā becomes Vāruṇī in the next *Kalpa* and attains Mukti. Sauparṇī does not have any Avatāra. Vāruṇī has *Avatāra* of Revatī and Peyā. Pārvatī became Satī Dākṣāyaṇī. All these three are inferior to their husbands by tenfold. They are *Sad Buddhi Abhimānīs*. *Vāruṇī* is higher to Umā. These have occasional *Kali Āveśa* and so they have sometimes wrong notions about Lord Hari, otherwise they are great *Viṣṇu Bhaktas*.

In the tenth class Rati and Śacī come. They are inferior

to their husbands Kāma and Indra ten times in quality. Rati was born as Rukmavatī and Lakṣmaṇā and married Pradyumna Deva *Avatāra* of Kāma; Śacī was as Tārā in *Tretā Yuga* and married Vāli (Indra *Avatāra*). In *Dvāpara Yuga* she became Citrāṅgadā and married Arjuna. She is *Jñāna Bhakti* giver.

In the fifteenth class Dakṣa Prajāpati's wife Prasūti shines. She is equal to Bhṛgu Maharṣi in innate nature.

In the seventeenth class, Bṛhaspati *Ācārya's* wife Tārā resides. Tārā is the presiding deity over *Sanmaṅgala* or auspicious things. She incarnated as Kṛpī and married Droṇācārya. In the same class there is another female deity by name Pravālī, wife of Pravala Vāyu.

In the twentieth *Kakṣā* we have the following female deities. Gaṅgā, Saṁjñā, Rohiṇī, Uṣā and Śyāmalā Devī. Gaṅgā became the wife of Śāntanu and delivered Bhīṣma; Saṁjñā is the wife of Sūrya Deva, Rohiṇī is the wife of Candra Deva. Uṣā as daughter of Bāṇāsura was the wife of Aniruddha son of Pradyumna. Śyāmalā is the wife of Yama, the *Dharmarāja*. She was born as Devakī during *Dvāpara Yuga* and married *Dharmaputra* alias Yudhiṣṭhira.

In the 22nd class Agni's wife Svāhā, *Haviṣya Abhimānī Devatā* comes. She is inferior to Gaṅgā Devī by twofold qualities.

In the 23rd class Kṛṣṇa Deva's actual mother Devakī and foster mother Yaśodā come. They are equal to another Uṣā Devī. This Uṣā Devī is *Nāmābhimānī Devatā* and wife of *Aśvinī Devatās*. All these three deities are inferior. Uṣā became *Śalya Putrī*, Mādrī and Jarāsandha's daughter and married Nakula and Sahadeva.

Dharā Devī, *Bhūmi Abhimānī Devatā* and *Kaśyapa Putrī* occupy the 25th class. In the 27th class there are 16000 *Agni Putrīs*. They all became as Kṛṣṇa *Patnīs* in *Dvāpara Yuga*. Among 16000 *Agni Putrīs* Kaseru has *Viśeṣa Sānnidhya* of Lakṣmī and she is superior to others. Then there are 100 *Apsarā Strīs* including Piṅgalā and Sairandhrī. Tilottamā was born as

Śalya Putrī and married Nakula. One *Apsaras* by name Urvaśī entered *Āsurika* body of Tāṭakā and Pūtanā. Another Urvaśī was born out of the thighs of Badrī Nārāyaṇa and entered in the body of Ambā, Bhīṣma's enemy.

Apart from these female deities in the 32nd class called as *Manuṣyottama Jīvas* there is a host of unknown *Muktiyogya* female souls. Similarly in the *Daitya Varga* also there is a host of female evil souls chief among them is *Kalipatnī*, Alakṣmī. She is known also as Mantharā. She occupies second position next to *Kali*. In the 13th position from *Kali*, *Asatya Abhimānī Daityā* Duḥśalā comes. She became as the sister of Duryodhana. In the 15th position female demons Tāṭakā and Pūtanā come. They fought with Rāma and Kṛṣṇa and died. Similarly there are many evil-natured female souls who go to eternal hell after *Brahma Kalpa*. In this way we can see a grand panorama of female souls occupying high positions in the divine hierarchy in *Mādhva Sampradāya* as seen otherwise also from great epics and *Purāṇas*. Therefore we should not desist simply because they are female souls. They occupy very high positions because of their innate capacity and their *Bhakti* to Lord Śrī Hari. We should worship these female deities and their indwelling Hari and obtain His grace according to our innate nature and capacity.

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मातृष्वसा मातुलानी श्वश्रूरथ पितृष्वसा।
संपूज्या गुरुपत्नीवत्समास्ता गुरुभार्यया॥

"The sisters of mother and father, wife of the maternal uncle, mother-in-law should be venerated like the wife of preceptor as they are all equal to her (one should offer *Praṇāma* to them by touching their feet)."

—*Manu Smṛti* (II.131)

The Vows Observed by a Hindu Lady

The Hindu ladies are religious-minded. They always observe certain *Vratas* and keep fast on special important occasions. By nature they are tender-hearted and always think of the ultimate good of their family members particularly brother, husband and son. Then they observe some of the *Vratas* for their own well-being and securing a comfortable position, when they pass away from the world. They undergo considerable inconveniences but the solace of their penancing observances is that their suffering will protect their beloved. *Vaṭa Sāvitrī* and *Hari Tālikā* they observe for the long life of the husband. They are quite unmindful of the behaviour they receive from their partners. Behind observing fast and worshipping Umā Maheśvara on the occasion of *Śivarātri*, the hidden desire for prolonging the vermilion mark as long as possible. *Bahulā* and *Bhrātṛ Dvitīyā* they observe for the long life of their brothers. On *Rakṣā Bandhana* they tie *Rakṣā Sūtra* on the right wrist of their brothers and pray for their long life and well-being. *Jīvatputrikā* they observe for their sons. Some of them keep fast on bright eleventh of every month for the good of their sons. It is supposed that those who observe this *Vrata* get sons and *Ekādaśī* is capable of protecting and providing a long life to their darlings.

Below, we will discuss some important occasions which they observe and celebrate.

Nava Rātra—

The start of *Nava Rātra* and the *Vikram*-era coincide. *Nava Rātra* covers a period of nine days. The Hindus male and female

both, observe fast taking some fruits or milk and avoiding cereal food. It is expected that everybody will worship Durgā, the female deity and expect all sorts of mundane comforts and spiritual good side by side. Among the participants ladies outnumber the gents. It culminates in the observance of *Rāma Navamī*, the birthday of Śrī Rāma.

Rāma Navamī—

Caitra Śukla Navamī every year, is celebrated with great pomp and show. On this day during noon hours Lord Rāma incarnated himself in Ayodhya from the womb of Kausalyā—the queen of king Daśaratha. In Ayodhya (Uttara Pradesh) there is an atmosphere of joy and festivity. People from different corners throng there, have a dip in Sarayū and worship Rāma and Hanumān. People who for their own reasons cannot visit Ayodhya, try to take bath in a river that does not dry up throughout a year. People give charitable alms to the *Brāhmaṇas* and poors according to their financial capacity.

Jānakī Navamī—

Vaiśākha Śukla Navamī is the date when *Devī* Sītā was born. Her birth is celebrated during the noon with a great festivity.

Vaṭa Sāvitrī—

Vaṭa Sāvitrī is a *Vrata* for maintaining a happy conjugal life upto eternity. On this day the married Hindu ladies worship banian tree for several reasons. Banian is a tree which never becomes old and never perishes. Periodically the new trunks develop and the tree goes on expanding. Just like that they want their husbands to become immortal and imperishable. Then there is another factor of Savitrihood. It is common knowledge how Sāvitrī fought against Yama and brought her husband back from the jaws of death. On this day by worshipping *Akṣaya Vaṭa* every Hindu lady supposes that she represents that very Sāvitrī. So the *Vrata* is called *Vaṭa Sāvitrī*.

Nirjalā Ekādaśī—

It is observed on *Jyeṣṭha Śukla Ekādaśī*. Generally even

water could not be sipped for twenty-four hours. It is known as *Bhīmasenī Ekādaśī* also. Since the middle *Pāṇḍava* Bhīma was a glutton, it was very difficult for him to observe fast every now and then. So a concession was made in his favour and he was permitted to observe fast only this day without water. It is supposed that one who observes this *Vrata*, gets the fruit of fasting all the twelve *Ekādaśīs* of the year.

Gaṇa Gaura—

On the third bright day of the month *Caitra* this *Vrata* is observed by the married ladies who have their husbands alive. Such ladies are called *Saubhāgyavatī* (very fortunate). Unmarried girls also equally participate in this function. An earthen image of Gaurī Śaṅkara is made and child Gaṇapati is placed in the arms of mother Gaurī. Then they worship the image with *Pūjā* materials like *Dūrvā*, *Sindūra* etc. They listen to some *Kathā* (religious story befitting the occasion) distribute the *Naivedya* after offering to the deities, among ladies only. Married ladies take the vermilion offered on Gaurī as *Prasāda* and apply to their heads. This *Vrata* is known as *Saubhāgya Sundarī Vrata* also.

Bhrātṛ Pañcamī—

On the dark fifth of *Śrāvaṇa* the ladies who have got brothers, worship the snakes and their holes. They intend through this worship to protect their brothers.

Nāga Pañcamī—

On the bright fifth of *Śrāvaṇa* the ladies make a thin paste of cow-milk and coal and with this paste they paint snakes on the wall. In certain localities cowdung is applied for the purpose. Parched paddy and milk they offer to Lord Ananta. This snake-worship is intended to avoid any danger from snakes.

Rakṣā Bandhana—

This day is enthusiastically awaited by the ladies—married and unmarried both. It falls on the full moon day of the month *Śrāvaṇa*. The ladies tie *Rakṣā Sūtra* (protecting thread) on the

right hand of their brothers, put some sweets in their mouth and wish for their long life. It is expected that the brothers in their turn will provide protection to the sisters. It has become a symbol of sisterly affection.

Kajjalī Tṛtīyā—

It falls on the dark third of *Bhādrapada*. It is a festival specially for newly wedded brides. This day they are adorned with beautiful clothings and ornaments and they distribute some special type of sweets. They swing and sing and enjoy the day. During the night ladies sing *Kajalī*. In the vicinity of Varanasi this *Kajalī* celebration continues for months together.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭamī—

It is not exactly a festival for ladies only. It is observed by males and females alike. They keep fast during the day and at the time of midnight they celebrate the birth of Lord Kṛṣṇa and break the fast by taking *Prasāda*. Of course, ladies are more active in the celebration. This festival is celebrated on the dark eighth of the month *Bhādrapada*.

Haritālikā—

This is a festival of exclusively ladies. It occurs on the bright third of the month *Bhādrapada*. The Hindu married ladies observe this *Vrata* by keeping complete fast for twenty-four hours even without water. In the next morning they give some charity of a special type containing eatables and cosmetics. It is only then that they break their fast. From this *Vrata* they expect long and happy conjugal life.

Jīvatputrikā—

This *Parva* occurs on the dark eighth of the month *Āśvina*. This is observed for the protection of offsprings. A special variety of botanical plant is worshipped and mothers pray for their sons to be strong and stout and live long. This day also the mothers observe complete fast for twenty-four hours without water. In the evening they again take bath and worship *Jīmūtavāhana*. The next morning after taking bath they wear

a cotton necklace called *Jīvatiyā* and give some alms.

Navarātra—

Navarātra starts from the first day of bright fortnight, continues for nine days and ends on *Vijayā Daśamī*. It is more famous as *Nava Durgā*. This *Śāradīya Navarātra* has some special significance and is popular throughout the country. But the enthusiasm of Bengal is more or less maddening . Everywhere the image of Mother Durgā is installed and worshipped for nine days. Crores and crores are spent simply on purchasing the images of the deity. On *Vijayā Daśamī* the images are immersed in the water particularly in a river if it is available. We can see in Bengal every Hindu lady worshipping the mother Durgā visiting the temples and giving alms. Bengal celebrates *Navarātra* like Maharashtra celebrates *Gaṇeśotsava*. Anyway it is not an exclusive festival for ladies.

Karaka Caturthī—

It is commonly known as *Karavā Cautha*. It occurs on dark fourth of *Kārtika*. The ladies observe and celebrate it in order to obtain a son (if they do not have) and pray for a long life of the son. They observe complete fast without water till the moon-rise in the night. After having seen the moon they will offer ablution to moon and then break their fast.

Bhrātṛ Dvitīyā—

This *Vrata* is also intended for the well-being of the brothers. This occurs on the second bright day of the month *Kārtika*. Ladies, married or unmarried make the *Raṅgolī* of square size in the courtyard of the house and offer their worships. If possible, they listen to the narration of Yama and Yamī episode. Brothers partake of sweets at the sister's house.

Sūrya Ṣaṣṭhī—

It occurs on the bright sixth of *Kārtika* and observed for the purpose of getting son or preserving his life. On previous day the ladies take meals only once in twenty-four hours and on this day keep fast even without water. The next day they break their

fast and take meals again only once. They go to some river or pond with sweets, fruits and coconuts. They offer these things to the sungod, take bath, sing songs and give ablution of milk to the sun.

Saṅkaṣṭa Caturthī—

It occurs on dark fourth of *Māgha* particularly when *Caturthī* is available during first hours of night. This *Vrata* is observed to avoïd any calamities to come. On this day ladies invoke and get Lord Gaṇeśa alongwith Siddhi and Buddhi seated on a sacred seat and worship him. They offer a *Naivedya* of sweet balls made of sesame seeds and *Apūpa*. They hear relevant stories from *Purāṇas* and offer ablution to moon and then break fast.

Vasanta Pañcamī—

This is the festival of gaiety. It occurs on bright fifth of *Māgha*. This day particularly Sarasvatī and Rati-Kāma are worshipped. This is known as *Madana Mahotsava* also. This is the birthday of Kāmadeva. It is a colourful day. Ladies like to wear garments of *Vasanta* colour (reddish yellow). This day is starting point for *Vasantotsava*. The atmospheric chillness starts diminishing and departing. In the North India Hindus start singing *Holī*-songs and are enthusiastically eager to welcome *Holī*.

Mahā Śivarātri—

This is a day when Lord Śiva and mother Pārvatī were wedded to each other. It is celebrated on the dark thirteenth day only when *Caturdaśī* is available in the night. People specially ladies observe fast, worship Śiva and Pārvatī with different intentions. Some people think that by keeping fast they will get the virtuous fruit of *Kanyādāna* while the ladies observe this *Vrata* for their unbroken conjugal life. Spiritual gain is another motive. Lord Śiva is offered milk, pure water, *Bilva Patra*, flowers, sugar-cane and berry fruits.

Holī—

Holī is a festival of colour and gaiety. People pour coloured

water over each other and apply coloured powders on the forehead and enjoy the day. They sing *Holī*-song and dance also. The ladies take part in celebrating *Holī* more actively, cook delicious dishes and distribute it among others.

These are some festivals and vows specifically observed by the ladies. Apart from them there are many more important festivals like *Dīpāvalī* and *Devotthānī Ekādaśī, Devaśayanī Ekādaśī, Guru Pūrṇimā* etc., etc., which are observed by men and women both.

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जलोदरसमायुक्ताः श्वित्रिणः पलितास्तथा।
अपुमांसः कृताः स्त्रीभिर्जडान्धबधिरास्तथा॥
पापानुगास्तु पापास्ताः पतीनुपसृजन्त्युत।
न जातु विप्रियं भर्तुः स्त्रिया कार्यं कथंचन॥

"There are women who have made their husbands suffer from incurable diseases like dropsy or leprosy by administering such medicines with the hope to captivate them. Those medicines have made them prematurely old, impotent, blind, dumb and deaf. This way such sinning ladies cause their husbands to undergo unwanted calamities. Therefore a chaste lady should never do anything against the interests of her husband."

—*Mahābhārata, Vana Parva* (233.16-17)

The doctrine of prenatal influence is now slowly being recognized, and science as well as religion calls out : 'keep yourself holy, and pure.' So deeply has this been recognized in India, that there we even speak of adultery in marriage, except when marriage is consummated in prayer. And I and every good Hindu believe, that my mother was pure and holy, and hence I owe her everything that I am. That is the secret of the race-chastity.

—*Swami Vivekananda*

The Divine Mother

—Swami Sivananda

Devī is the Mother of all. The pious and the wicked, the rich and the poor, the saint and the sinner are all Her children. In this world, all the wants of the child are provided by the mother. The child's growth, development and sustenance are looked after by the mother. Even so, all the necessities of life and its activities in this world, and the energy needed for it, depend upon *Śakti* or the Universal Mother. The human mother is a manifestation of the Universal Mother. All women are forms of the Divine Mother.

You are more free with your mother than with anybody else. You open your heart more freely to your mother than to your father. There is no God greater than the mother. It is the mother who protects you, nourishes you, consoles you, cheers you and nurses you. She sacrifices her all for the sake of her children. She is your first *Guru*. The first syllable which almost every quadruped or human being utters, is the beloved name of the mother 'Ma'. A child is more familiar with the mother than with the father, because the former is very kind, loving, tender and affectionate, and looks after the wants of the child. Whenever the child wants anything it runs with outstretched hands to the mother rather than to the father. If she hears the cry of the child she leaves her domestic work and runs immediately to attend to the child. In the spiritual field also, the aspirant or the devotee (the spiritual child) has more intimate relationship with Mother Durgā than with her father, Śiva.

It behoves, therefore, that the aspirant should approach the

Mother first, so that She may introduce Her spiritual child to the Father for its illumination or Self-realization. That is the reason why the devotees have placed Rādhā, Sītā, Gaurī etc., first in the jugal (combined) names, such as Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, Sītā-Rāma, Gaurī-Śaṅkara, Umā-Śaṅkara, Bhavānī-Śaṅkara, Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa.

Mother's grace is boundless, Her mercy is illimitable, Her knowledge is infinite, Her power is immeasurable, Her glory is ineffable, Her splendour is indescribable. Approach Her with an open heart. Lay bare your heart before Her with frankness and humility. Be as simple as a child. Kill ruthlessly egoism, cunningness, selfishness and crookedness. Make a total, unreserved, ungrudging surrender to Her. Sing Her praises, repeat Her name and worship Her with faith and unflinching devotion.

Worship of the Divine Mother—

Worship of Devī or the Universal Mother gives not only prosperity, but liberation from all bondage. It leads to the attainment of knowledge of the Self. The story of the *Kena Upaniṣad*, known as the *Yakṣa-Praśna*, supports this view.

Śakti is all. She can do anything. She can make or mar, she can mend or end. For the sake of the continuance of Her divine play here, She Herself, as the veil of ignorance, has veiled the truth from you and bound you to this *Saṁsāra* (worldly existence). When she is propitiated through the practice of sincere devotion and unconditional self-surrender, She, as knowledge, removes the veil and enables one to perceive the truth.

No one can free himself from the thraldom of mind and matter without Mother's grace. The fetters of *Māyā* are too hard to break. If the aspirant worships Her as the great Mother, he can very easily go beyond the phenomenal world through Her benign grace and blessings. She will remove all obstacles in the path, lead him safely into the illimitable domain of eternal bliss and make him absolutely free.

The aspirant thinks that the world is identical with the

Divine Mother. He moves about thinking his own form to be the form of the Divine Mother, and thus beholds oneness everywhere. He also feels that the Divine Mother is identical with *Brahma*.

Worship of the Divine Mother, intense faith, perfect devotion and Self-surrender will help one to attain Her grace. Through Her grace alone can knowledge of the imperishable be attained.

Durgā: Lakṣmī: Sarasvatī—

Divine Mother is everywhere triple. She is endowed with the three *Guṇas—Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*; she manifests as will (*Icchā Śakti*), action (*Kriyā Śakti*) and knowledge (*Jñāna Śakti*); she is *Brāhma-Śakti* (Sarasvatī) in conjunction with Brahmā, *Viṣṇu-Śakti* (Lakṣmī) in conjunction with Lord Viṣṇu and *Śiva-Śakti* (Mahākālī or Durgā) in conjunction with Lord Śiva.

Sarasvatī is cosmic intelligence, cosmic consciousness, cosmic knowledge. Lakṣmī does not merely mean material wealth like gold, cattle, etc., but all kinds of prosperity, glory, magnificence, joy, exaltation or greatness come under Lakṣmī. Durgā (Devī) is the transformative power of Divinity, the power that dissolves multiplicity in unity.

Devī (Durgā) assumes many aspects according to the tasks to be performed by Her—sometimes sweet and tender, and at other times terrible and devouring. She is always kind and gracious to Her devotees. Arjuna, the *Pāṇḍava* hero, worshipped Her before starting the fight against the evil-minded *Kauravas*. Śrī Rāma worshipped Her at the time of the fight with Rāvaṇa, to invoke Her aid in the war. He fought and won through Her grace. When Viṣṇu and Mahādeva destroyed various demons, the power of Devī was behind them. Devī took Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra and gave them the necessary *Śakti* to proceed with the work of creation, preservation and destruction.

The Concept of Womanhood in Padmacarita

—Surendra Kumar Garg

The present article based on *Padmacarita* of Raviṣeṇa—a famous epic-poet of Jaina literature, exposes a lovely and most dignified picture of sublimated womanhood and its honourable position in the society particularly in the eyes of the Jaina poet. The readers while reading the essay are requested to make a compromise with the unchallenged right of a poet to arrange and present the happenings in a sequence to suit his purpose. Raviṣeṇa has also taken the liberty. The main point for appreciation is how he has exploited the turning points for avoiding ugliness and for enhancing the dignity of woman.

—Editor

Padmacarita is the first *Saṁskṛta* epic in Jaina religion, pertaining to the recital of Rāma. No wonder, its creator *Jainācārya* Raviṣeṇa is regarded as the Jaina-Vālmīki.

The narrative of *Padmacarita* is full of wondrous pro-woman elements; even exposing the atrocities of man on woman (the Pawanañjaya-Añjanā Sundarī conjugal chronicle *Parva* 15—17). It is so pathetic that I might be allowed to comment—the pen that wrote Añjanā Sundarī's conjugal career was dipped in tears. I am reminded of the lines—

अबला जीवन हाय तुम्हारी यही कहानी।
आँचल में है दूध और आँखों में पानी॥

If there have entered a few remarks about the awful nature (elegant-shape) of womenfolk, it is either to follow the conventional form of his predecessors, or just to make us

mindful of her tantalizing beauty, lest too much association with her should put impediments in our way to attaining ultimate goal, viz., beatitude (*Mokṣa*). After all, woman is the best/loveliest creation of God. No doubt, "There is no purgatory but woman, meaning the company of a woman has all the torments of purgatory for a man." But the proverb also goes—'women are necessary evils.' And satisfiable enough, Raviṣeṇa's mouthpiece on such reproaches is the rival-candidate, particularly emphasizing on the awareness from another person's better half—

परस्त्री तु विशेषतः।

(*Parva* 72. 55)

There is an important saying—"One man's meat is another man's poison." In *Hindī* also, we have preachings like—

पर नारी पैनी छुरी तीन ओर से खाय।
धन हरै यौवन हरै और नरक ले जाय॥

Thus, the wise Raviṣeṇa has saved our pious hero (Rāma) from uttering piercing words, as well as himself from inviting unnecessary criticism by not allowing, every now and then, unpleasant depiction of our goddesses on earth in his tremendous work.

We find Raviṣeṇa's having substantial regard, a soft corner, for our womenkind. He was a contented/reputed householder. Even the so-called villain of the ancient *Brāhmaṇa* lore, here in *Padmacarita* has an intact fancy of the honour and dignity of the women race. His eloquence speech at one place is an animate example of gynaecolatry—

विधवा भर्तृसंयुक्ता प्रमदा कुल बालिका।
वेश्या च रूपयुक्तापि परिहार्या प्रयत्नतः॥

(*Parva* 12. 124)

"Be it a widow, a woman with her husband; a damsel, or even a beautiful harlot; another (person's) woman as a whole should be cautiously refrained from."

Rāvaṇa rebukes and reprimands his brother Bhānukarṇa (Kumbhakarṇa) when the latter comes in victorious with the ladies of Varuṇa's city as prisoners—

अहोऽत्यन्तमिदं बाल त्वया दुश्चरितं कृतम्।
कुलनार्यो यदानीता वन्दीग्रहणपञ्जरम्॥

(*Parva* 19. 84)

His heart bleeds at the very sight, and so he would, at once, let them go to their respective homes—

इत्युक्त्वा मोचितास्तेन क्षिप्रं ता ययुरालयम्।
आश्वासिता गिरा साध्व्यः सद्यः शिथिलसाध्वसाः॥

(*Ibid*. 87)

Here is an echo of *Bhagavān* Manu's noble concept of women—

यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः।

(*Manusmṛti* III. 56)

Raviṣeṇa's Rāvaṇa feels highly distressed to witness Sītā's pathetic bewailing for her husband. In such moments, his inner conflict is influential to a great degree (72. 49—53) e. g.

धिक् धिक् किमिदमश्लाघ्यं कृतं सुविकृतं मया।
यदन्योन्यरतं भीरुमिथुनं सद्वियोजितम्॥

(*Parva* 72. 51)

But the only knot of his heart is that he first wants to win Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa valiantly on the battlefield; and then restore Sītā to Rāma, thus safeguarding his prestige (ego) (72. 67-68) e.g.

पश्चाद्विभवसंयुक्तो पद्मनाभाय मैथिलीम्।
अर्पयामि न मे पापं तथा सत्युपजायते॥

(*Parva* 72. 68)

Raviṣeṇa has even folded and moulded the root events of the *Rāmakathā*, simply to extract desired opportunity to express his deep love and affection in the lotus-feet of these goddesses on earth.

In *Padmacarita*, Rāma is not a banished son, owing to the hard-heartedness of his step-mother. He rather abdicates to gear up her (here Kaikeyī's) attempt of dissuading Bharata from becoming a monk, (in line with his father intending to do so). Moreover, Rāma does not go to the forest, but to another town (s)—

....गच्छाम्यहं पुरान्तरम्।

(*Parva* 31. 185)

Thus, kind Raviṣeṇa saves noble Bharata's mother Kaikeyī from the age-old blot of sending innocent Rāma to the exile. Here, Kekayā even asks her son Bharata to go and bring the two brothers, alongwith Sītā, back to Ayodhya; as without them, there is no comfort in anything—

पुत्र राज्यं त्वया लब्धं प्रणताखिलराजकम्।
पद्मलक्ष्मणनिर्मुक्तमलमेतन्न शोभते॥
विना ताभ्यां विनीताभ्यां किं राज्यं का सुखासिका।
का वा जनपदे शोभा तव का वा सुवृत्तता॥

(32. 105-106)

तस्मादानय तौ क्षिप्रं समं ताभ्यां महासुखः।

(*Ibid*. 109)

She continues—"Ride thou on a speedy steed (horse) and I'll follow thee too"—

व्रज तावत्त्वमारुह्य तुरङ्गं जातरंहसम्।
आव्रजाम्यहमप्येषा सुपुत्रानुपदं तव॥

(*Ibid*. 110)

She is full of remorse at the very sight of Rāma-Lakṣmaṇa deprived of Ayodhya, so bursts into tears unobstructedly—

दृष्ट्वा परमशोकेन निर्भरीकृतमानसा।
हाकारमुखरा चेतावालिङ्ग्य रुदिता चिरम्॥

(*Ibid* . 126)

Kekayā personally asks Rāma to pack up and move back to rule over Ayodhya—

पुत्रोत्तिष्ठ पुरीं यामः कुरु राज्यं सहानुजः।
ननु त्वया विहीनं मे सकलं विपिनायते॥

(*Ibid* . 128)

Here, our former National poet Śrī Maithilī Śaraṇa Gupta, seems to have snatched his ideal of portraying Kaikeyī in a lofty manner, from this Jaina poet Raviṣeṇa himself. In *Sāketa* also, Kaikeyī speaks out her heart in the following manner—

यह सच है तो फिर लौट चलो घर भैया,
अपराधिन मैं हूँ तात, तुम्हारी मैया।

Thus we see that Kaikeyī (Kekayī) of *Padmacarita* bears no malice, not even for the time being, against Rāma a co-wife's son. *Bhagavān* Manu says—

"A wise man should not marry an alliance without brother; as it might imply apprehension that her father claims for *Piṇḍadāna,* i. e., oblation of knead flour/boiled or cooked rice through the hands of his daughter's first son"—

यस्यास्तु न भवेद्भ्राता न विज्ञायेत वा पिता।
नोपयच्छेत तां प्राज्ञः पुत्रिकाधर्मशङ्कया॥

(*Manusmṛti* III. 11)

So, Raviṣeṇa has been amply careful in providing this privilege to our adorable Sītā, a brotherless lass of the *Rāmāyaṇa/ Rāmacaritamānasa*. In *Padmacarita*, Sītā has a (-twin-) brother, named Bhāmaṇḍala (26. 148) who, though separated in the beginning (26. 121—164), later on assists Rāma widely in his battle against Rāvaṇa (54.37, 55. 74-75, 58.24, 60.85, 60.102, 61. 10—12, 65. 2 and so on).

Ācārya Raviṣeṇa has been very cautious not to under estimate the dignity of women while depicting the female characters in his *Padmacarita* which is quite massive in bulk. Be it Rāma side, or Rāvaṇa side; he has been substantially liberal. Even the predominant event of Sītā's abduction, occurs, here, not as a retaliation of the chopping of Śūrpaṇakhā's nose and ears; but on account of the unfortunate incident/accident in which her (here Candranakhā's) son (Śaṁbūka) gets beheaded (43. 61—73) at the hands of Lakṣmaṇa, while evincing the Sūryahā (43. 45—49); (also see 44/27-28, 59).

Here Raviṣeṇa has saved our Rāma, a great maintainer of decorum, from the unpleasant issue/scandal of variegating a frail woman.

Hardly can we find an occasion in *Padmacarita* wherein Raviṣeṇa has depicted our womenkind, mere a thing of derision

or sensual pleasure; or arousing our feelings of the type. Nay, he has muffled them from being caricatured as such. The monkey (ape) king Sugrīva, gets here deprived of his wife, (power and pelf) not at the hands of his elder brother Bāli/Vālī, oh, an indecent, a rather shameful treatment in kinship, but another *Vidyādhara* (demigod, or genic), named Sāhasagati teases him as such by putting on his (Sugrīva's) disguise (47. 34-35). Sāhasagati is dissolute and has an evil eye on Sugrīva's blonde better half Sutārā (*Ibid.*).

As a matter of fact, in *Padmacarita*, Bāli bears no grudge against his younger brother Sugrīva. He, rather embraces monkdom handing over/entrusting all his stately positions to Sugrīva—

इत्युक्त्वा निर्गतो गेहाद् बभूव च निरम्बरः।
पार्श्वे गगनचन्द्रस्य गुरोर्गुणगरीयसः।।

(9. 90)

Thus, once again, Raviṣeṇa saves both—a faithful wife from forceful molestation and a brother (elder) from unrighteousness—

अनुज बधू भगिनी सुत नारी। सुनु सठ कन्या सम ए चारी॥

(*Mānasa* IV. 9. 4)

Hanumān, the *Kṣetraja* son (i. e., one of the twelve sons (sanctioned by our holy books) of Kesarī, and *Aurasa* (i. e., the real) son of the air-god (Pavana) in *Vālmīkīya*, is born here very much out of the usual conjugal-copulation of mother and father (16. 166—213); and not that the air-god (mentally) seduced his mother.

The name of his mother is Añjanā Sundarī—

उदपाद्यनुजा तेषां कीर्तिताञ्जनसुन्दरी।
त्रैलोक्यसुन्दरीरूपसंदोहेनैव निर्मिता॥

(*Padmacarita* 15. 16)

and that of his father is Pavanañjaya—

तयोर्विक्रमसंभारो रूपशीलो गुणाम्बुधिः।
पवनञ्जयनामास्ति तनयो नयमण्डनः॥

(*Ibid.* 49)

As the fate would take it, his mother had remained discarded

by his father, from the very first day of wedding for twenty-two years, apparently for no fault of her. Pawanañjaya confesses—

तस्या विनापराधेन मया परिभवः कृतः।
द्व्यग्रं विंशतिमब्दानां पाषाणसमचेतसा॥

(16.137)

There is, however, one beauty spot in Raviṣeṇa's account of Añjanā Sundarī's pathetic description that her son Śrī Śaila (Hanūmān) avenges the disregard and disgrace meted out to her at the hands of her father, Mahendra Ketu when she was turned out by her mother-in-law, Ketumatī.

This is a unique example of the elements of mother-worship in Hanūmān, something which even our *Ādi Kavi* (i. e., the first poet) Vālmīki or Tulasīdāsa did not bother to highlight. Here, Hanūmān has a sincere love and tender regard for his mother. The worthy son succeeds in restoring the lost honour and dignity, and even innocence of his mother—

मातापितृसमायोगं सोदरस्य च दर्शनम्।
अञ्जनासुन्दरी प्राप्य जगाम परमां धृतिम्॥

(50. 52)

Hanūmān had to fight with his maternal uncle and maternal grandfather during his compaign of Lanka—

मातरं शरणं प्राप्तं मम निर्वास्य यः कृती।
व्यसनप्रतिदानेन महेन्द्रं किं नु तं भजेत्॥

(50. 12)

After a fierce battle (50. 126-127) the brave son succeeds in capturing both of them (50. 24, 35.36). Thus, the arrogant king Mahendra is compelled to go and beg pardon of his innocent daughter Añjanā Sundarī—

गत्वामहेन्द्रकेतुश्च तनयां नयकोषिदः।
प्रसन्नकीर्तिना सार्द्धं वत्सलः समपूजयत्॥

(*Ibid* . 51)

As for Ketumatī, we don't have any hint of Hanūmān's giving weightage to his grandma.

In *Rāmāyaṇa* or *Mānasa*, we are left thinking as to what happened with Śūrpaṇakhā. She disappears from the scene

exactly after exciting her brother Rāvana. How did she purify her sins? We have such atonement in *Padmacarita*. Here, she is a converted nun—

लब्ध्वा बोधिमनुत्तमां शशिनखाऽप्यार्यामिमामाश्रिता।

(78. 95)

And, Mandodarī is not remarried with her younger brother-in-law. Oh, a rather shameful kinship. She is also a converted nun—

त्यक्ताशेषगृहस्थवेषरचना मन्दोदरी संयता।
जाताऽत्यन्त विशुद्धधर्म निरता शुक्लैकवस्त्राऽऽवृता।

(*Ibid*. 94)

Tulasī rectifies such obscene situations by writing—

जेहिं अघ बधेउ ब्याध जिमि बाली। फिरि सुकंठ सोइ कीन्हि कुचाली॥
सोइ करतूति बिभीषन केरी। सपनेहुँ सो न राम हियँ हेरी॥

(*Mānasa* I. 29. 3,4)

To save the usual public slander/scandal, there is another indirect reason of Sītā's abandonment in *Padmacarita* viz., in her previous birth she (as a virgin named Vedavatī) had mocked at a hermit, entering her father's abode for alms—

भिक्षार्थिनं मुनिं गेहं प्रविष्टमवलोक्य सा।
उपहासात्ततः पित्रा शापिता श्राविकाऽभवत्॥

(106. 142)

Thus, Raviṣeṇa seems to be saving our Rāma, to some extent, from the infamy of forcing Sītā to suffer another exilement.

Thus, we see that the concept of womanhood in Raviṣeṇa's *Padmacarita* is purely of that a 'न' + 'अरि' i. e., hostile to none. At the same time, she is not a deity enriched with some heavenly power (s); or not primarily an object of man's laughter and hatred. Man is also liable to protect her from injury and harm.

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The flower of sweetest smell is shy and lovely.

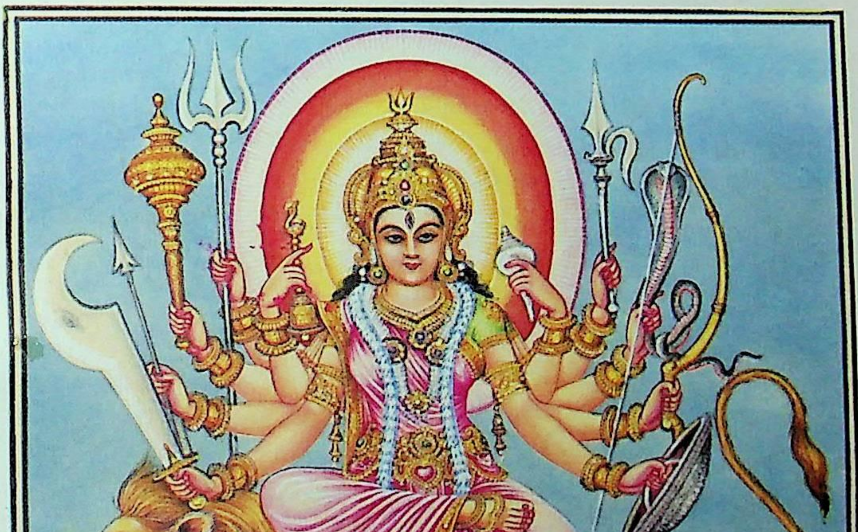
—*Wordsworth*

Śakti—the Divine Mother

—Srikrishna Das

All the attributes assigned to Śiva are equally applicable to Śakti. Śiva and Śakti are really one, like heat and fire, moon and moonlight, ocean and waves, and sun and sun-rays. A power-holder cannot remain without power and power cannot exist without power-holder. Śakti is called *Kula* and Śiva *Akula*. Both are inseparable, like negative and positive poles of a magnet. Śakti-Umā, Pārvatī or cosmic energy is Śiva's eternal wedded consort, occupying half of His body or dancing on His limitless chest. Their eternal union is called *Virasa* but when individualised they are still in perfect union and is called *Rasa*. This kind of relationship is called blissful (*Ānandamaya*), eternal (*Anantatvam*), as also an unbreakable indistinguishable union. In *Śrī Cakra*, *Bindu* and four triangles pointing downward are of Śiva and five pointing upward represent Śakti, indicating permanent and perfect unity of the two in one.

Śiva cannot carry on His functions of the universe without Śakti. She is called Śrī Mātā (creator of the universe) Śrī Mahārājñī (protector) and Śrīmātāṣimbhaneśvarī (dissolver) named according to the function She performs. She is *Cit Śakti* (intelligence) dynamic energy (*Kuṇḍalinī*) that lies dormant in *Mūlādhāra Cakra* at the base of the spine. When aroused, it travels upward to *Sahasrāra* passing through the intermediate centres such as *Svādhiṣṭhāna*, *Maṇipūra*, *Anāhata*, *Viśuddha*. Centres are not physical but are in astral sphere, scientists called this biological plasma, *Prāṇa* or bio-*Prāṇa*. It can awaken miraculous powers in the human being. All the centres are



Mounting the lion

conceived as lotuses hanging with their heads down, when *Kuṇḍalinī* strikes, and opens the centres, the lotuses are turned face upward and there is manifestation of super-energy.

Śakti is with form or without form. She is called *Prakṛti* in *Sāṅkhya*, *Avidyā* in *Vedānta*, *Mātṛkā* by the grammarian, Śakti by *Śāktas* and Devī by *Paurāṇikas*. Śakti is the seed of spatial universes—the ether personified. The energy which enables thinking is called *Vimarśa* that which enables procreating is *Rati*, and that which causes dissolution, liberation, and time-cycle is called Kālī. Śakti is multi-dimensional and multi-functional.

She is a shining white queen-swan, that floats in the tranquil minds of sages. There are more than 108 names of Divine Mother, e. g., *Paramadhāma* (supreme abode), *Paramajyotiḥ*, (original light of which all other lights are derivations, simultations and reflections), *Sat-Cit-Ānanda-Rūpiṇī*, (truth, consciousness and bliss), *Māheśvarī* (Mother of wisdom and power), *Guhya Rūpiṇī* (secret form) *Chandassārā* (essence of *Vedas*), *Hṛdayasthā* (residing in the heart), *Yogānandā* (bliss of *Yoga*), *Prema Rūpā* (embodiment of love) and so on. These names can serve as helpful theme of meditation. Actually she is all (*Sarvamayī*).

Śakti and Śiva or Umā-Maheśvara, Śiva-Durgā or Lakṣmī and Nārāyaṇa or Rādhā and Śrīkṛṣṇa or Sītā and Rāma or *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* are one and the same.

In Vedic literature, Śrī and Lakṣmī both are mentioned. Later these two deities merge into one. In prehistoric period, the great Mother goddess, *Mā* and the Father God, were associated with lion and bull respectively as are Śiva and Śakti. The Vedic *Dyaus* and *Pṛthvī* or *Aditi* are Aryan equivalents of the same deities. In Vedic era *Devī Sūkta* of the *Ṛgveda* shows the supreme goddess related to Rudra as His strength.

Various ways of approach are laid down due to differences in human temperaments, idiosyncrasy, stages of intellectual development of the aspirants and their different environments on this globe.

Hindu polytheism is universal store of knowledge. It aims at discovering one in all and all in one. It is accumulated during the aeons, discovered by man through his own efforts or by revelations of the seers in different *Yugas*. Since man came to live on the earth, he has been trying to solve the riddle of life and universe. He succeeded in making many discoveries but the more he discovers, the more he finds it incomprehensive unexplored and enigmatic. He however, observed many divine forces working in the universe and named them according to their virtues.

The sages through *Yoga*, meditation, and *Tapas* attained spiritual insight. They are blessed with visions, intuition and are able to see beyond time, space, thought and manifested world and gave mankind a glimpse of cosmic consciousness.

Not only has earth living beings, in cosmos, there are many planets on which life does exist. Similarly there are millions of universes, galaxies, which float like bubbles in the unimaginable space. According to the Hindus, for every universe, there is the same trinity—Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, creator, sustainer and dissolver. Absolute Being, *Parameśvara, Parama Brahma, Paramaśiva*, presides over all in Father aspect; *Mahāmāyā*, (*Cidrūpā*) *Parabrahmasvarūpiṇī*, *Saccidānandarūpiṇī*, in Mother aspect. *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* says *Mahāmāyā* is *Niṣkala*, *Nirguṇa*, i. e., endless, undecaying, unthinkable and eternal (*Nitya*) and transient (*Anitya*).

Thus fatherhood and motherhood are merely distinction of name and are two aspects of the selfsame reality.

Without any confusion, an aspirant has to choose his *Iṣṭadeva* and surrender to Him or Her. The aim is to introvert the mind and concentrate on a point and then to go beyond thought to experience the ultimate truth.

It is *Bhāva*, devotion, sincerity and passion of the devotee that matters and not the deity.

As the Mother aspect of God is more kind, loving and has

melting compassion for her devotees, let us first offer our prayer and obeisance to Her with full devotion and love. A devotee must pray for Her grace for success on the spiritual path. He must surrender and lose his ego. He must make room for divinity to manifest and shine within. In the ocean of bliss the devotee sinks and loses himself, feeling 'He am I' "*So'ham*".

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I shall again tell what is beneficial to the worlds and auspicious as regards the women. Those meritorious women, having got up early go, after the chaste lady, to my position, as a result of their religious merit.

(The vow) is recommended for six months, or an year or more. The chaste woman, as long as she is pure, would go to heaven. The woman, who follows her husband, takes him, who is a drunkard, the killer of a *Brāhmaṇa*, or full of all sins, to heaven from the mud (of sin).

He shines like the god of love, and she is charming like Rati. In the world only, she experiences unending pleasure.

She, who, on the death of her lord at a distant place after having got his insignia, dies through her prowess as a chaste woman, emancipates her husband from sin.

—*Padma Purāṇa, Sṛṣṭi Khaṇḍa* (52.63—68a)

भ्रातुर्भार्योपसंग्राह्या सवर्णाऽहन्यहन्यपि।
विप्रोष्य तूपसंग्राह्या ज्ञातिसम्बन्धियोषितः॥

"One should make *Praṇāma* everyday by touching her feet, to the wife of his elder brother provided she is from his own cast. But to the other relative women either from his father's side or mother's side or from the wife's side, one should offer salutations only when he comes back after a long stay in a far off place. The latter should not be saluted everyday.

—*Manu Smṛti* (II.132)

The Importance of Pātivrata in Purāṇas

The Indian mythological literature is replete with the magnanimous role of women in the society and the magnanimity of their conjugal fidelity. The conception of Pativratahood is a very unique contribution of Indian thinking to the socio-religious structure of the universe. Nowhere else in the world we find any such scheme for the smooth running of married life. It will not be wrong to say that it is only Hindu contribution. The modern mind is of the opinion that the conception of Pativratahood is a hoax and worthless idea. It is only the result of the thinking pattern of a society dominated by male members. This attitude is apparently wrong because barring very few exceptions almost the entire world is breathing in a society dominated by males but no other society did lay so much emphasis on this point. Polygamy was prevalent in the history almost all over the world. Even now in Muslim law a male member is allowed to have four wives. In the Arabian countries every *Amīra* has his own harem full of legal or illegal wives. Even then they think that all the ladies will be faithful to them but they take it as a prerogative not to be faithful to them. That is more or less disastrous for the social welfare.

In Western countries where bigamy has been abolished and declared to be a cognisable offence, divorcing is rampant. This is also an unhealthy sign. Specially for the future generation it is not good. We in India fail to appreciate how they change their partners so frequently as changing shirts and pants. Once there appeared a news item in papers that in America a ninety-five

year old gentleman married for sixty-fifth time and the lady was already married sixty-one times prior to this marriage. Is it not a fun? In so many countries they do not give any importance to the sexual indulgences. It is not an ingredient of personal character whereas in India and specially among Hindus it is the very backbone of character.

How Scientific—

It is an experimented fact that the first insemination leaves permanent effect on the female womb. This scientific fact is ignored by most of the scientists eventhough it is the essence of Pativratahood. This fact was recognised by the Hindu sages of yore who are not supposed to be scientists. That is why they emphasized feminine chastity so much.

However the Hindu *Purāṇas* are most eloquent about the feminine chastity and its fantastic potency. They declare that wife can reach any height by serving her husband faithfully and unreservedly. Our scriptures say that there is no other penance or religious observance prescribed for a wife. Serving her husband is enough for her. The sage Vālmīki says—

नगरस्थो वनस्थो वा शुभो वा यदि वाऽशुभः।
यासां स्त्रीणां प्रियो भर्ता तासां लोका महोदयाः॥
दुश्शीलः कामवृत्तो वा धनैर्वा परिवर्जितः।
स्त्रीणामार्यस्वभावानां परमं दैवतं पतिः॥

(*Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* II. 117. 23-24)

"Whether living in a city or in a forest, whether good or bad, husband must be dear to the wife. One who is so, both the worlds are secured for her."

"Whether ill-mannered or libidinous or a pauper, for the chaste ladies the husband is the ultimate God."

All the Hindu law-givers are unanimous so far as the sexual chastity of a lady is concerned. The most liberal Manu also is very particular on this point. He says—

यस्मै दद्यात्पिता त्वेनां भ्राता वाऽनुमते पितुः।
तं शुश्रूषेत जीवन्तं संस्थितं च न लङ्घयेत्॥

(*Manusmṛti* V. 151)

"To whomsoever the father or with his permission the brother gives his daughter or sister, it is the bounden duty of a wife to serve unreservedly her husband while he is alive. Even (after the husband is dead) she should not think of any other person. In no case they should overstep."

According to Manu—"Husband is the only comforting agent to his wife either in this life or hereafter" (*Manusmṛti* V. 153). Then in tune with the contemporary social customs he also declared—

विशीलः कामवृत्तो वा गुणैर्वा परिवर्जितः।
उपचर्यः स्त्रिया साध्व्या सततं देववत्पतिः॥

(*Manusmṛti* V. 154)

"Even if the husband is a rogue, infatuated with the others' wives, devoid of meritorious qualities but a chaste lady should treat and adore him like God."

In the very next verse he says—"For a married lady there is no sacrificial ritual to be performed alone and no vow or fast is at all necessary. A lady who serves and nurses her husband faithfully, attains the heaven and commands respect there too" (*Manusmṛti* V. 155).

नास्ति स्त्रीणां पृथग्यज्ञो न व्रतं नाप्युपोषणम्।
पतिं सुश्रूषते येन तेन स्वर्गे महीयते॥

"A lady desirous of her husband's abode whether alive or dead, does not do any act unapproved by her husband" (*Manusmṛti* V. 156).

पाणिग्राहस्य साध्वी स्त्री जीवतो वा मृतस्य वा।
पतिलोकमभीप्सन्ती नाचरेत्किंचिदप्रियम्॥

"After the demise of the husband a lady is required to observe complete celibacy. If she does it she attains the heaven even if she has no son."

मृते भर्तरि साध्वी स्त्री ब्रह्मचर्ये व्यवस्थिता।
स्वर्गं गच्छत्यपुत्रापि यथा ते ब्रह्मचारिणः॥

(*Manusmṛti* V. 160)

"Even motivated by desire of having a son, if a lady transgresses the rule and oversteps the husband, she is condemned in this world and falls from the heaven."

अपत्यलोभाद्या तु स्त्री भर्तारमतिवर्तते।
सेह निन्दामवाप्नोति पतिलोकाच्च हीयते॥

(*Manusmṛti* V. 161)

These are the mildest expressions ever ejaculated by the author of any other *Smṛti*. In the Puranic literature and classical literature composed in the medieval age the expressions of this type are much stronger.

Eventhough polygamy was prevalent in the society, yet monogamy has always been treated as praiseworthy. The ideal of Rāma has always been praised eventhough he had two more step-mothers. We do not find any reference that a male member must have been condemned for polygamy.

Undoubtedly we find all law-givers unanimously declaring that there is nothing unattainable for a *Pativratā*; even the sky may not be a limit. *Purāṇas* and *Mahākāvyas* are full of references that a *Pativratā* woman performing no other penance has reached the zenith of spiritual glory. Such ladies have been described to have liberated their so many generations of both the families. Janaka says to Sītā—"पुत्रि पबित्र किए कुल दोऊ" ("My child, you have sanctified both the families."

In *Padma Purāṇa* and *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* we find an episode such as *Maṇimāṇḍavyopākhyāna*. There was a brahmin lady named Śaibyā or Śāṇḍilī. Her husband was a frightful patient of stinking leprosy but to Śaibyā he was no less than the Supreme God. She nursed him. She served him. She tried to fulfil all his desires unhesitatingly. She never considered the right or wrong; propriety or impropriety of his desires. To obey his commands and fulfil his desires was her only *Dharma*. When the brahman was cursed by the sage Māṇḍavya to die with the rising sun, she said—"There will be no sunrise hereafter." The sun stopped rising. According to *Padma Purāṇa*

all the three worlds were engulfed by the darkness. Fourth day the trinity of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva approached her. They beseeched. They preached. They requested. They cajoled. But she was adamant. She could not even think of losing her husband although a case of leprosy. Then in the end Brahmā promised her to give a new life to and renovate her husband but she should allow the sun to appear. She somehow agreed. The sun rose. Her husband died, rather burnt to ashes. But Brahmā as he promised, through his *Saṅkalpa*, brought him to life again quite hale and healthy.

According to *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* Anasūyā, the crest-jewel among chaste ladies and wife of sage Atri, intervened after ten days. Requested and persuaded by the gods she personally went to Śaibyā and assured her to bestow a new life to her husband as soon as the sun rises. According to this *Purāṇa* the entire universe was engulfed into the darkness for ten days. On the eleventh day, after Anasūyā promised for a new and healthy life, Śaibyā released the sun.

My dear readers, think of it in your own way, how could this have been possible. But do always remember one thing that spirituality begins where rationality ends.

Though there are innumerable episodes of this type, I will draw your attention to one of them found in *Mahābhārata*. It is about a brahman practising austere penance and earning some unearthly powers. He could burn a flying bird only through his ferocious look. He felt very proud of his achievement and went on a tour and on the way he called on the doors of a householder. The mistress of the house requested the accomplished brahman to wait for sometime as she was otherwise busy. The brahman became furious and then he heard the lady saying from within the house—"O exalted sage, I am not the bird which you burnt with your look." Then she advised him to go to another lady in a different and distant village. There also he received the same reply. Here there was an addition, the lady

told the name of the previous lady who recommended her name. By this time the pride of the poor brahman was completely melted away. The narration is incomplete. But it is more than enough to indicate that these two ladies already knew telepathically or in whatever way, what happened with the brahman. Just like us the brahman was also astonished to know about the spiritual achievements. When asked by him he was told that it was the maintenance of *Pātivrata Dharma* and serving their husband physically, orally and mentally with complete faith and devotion.

We read in the *Purāṇas* how Sāvitrī dragged Satyavān, her husband from the jaws of death and how she secured valuable boons from Yama, the lord of death. These days it appears simply fantastic and unbelievable. But we must not forget that what we fail to perceive directly is not non-existent. One thing is very certain that the peaceful social life is possible only through the domestic peace and that can be possible only when the couple makes one entity and the sense of duality is totally abolished. Since man is entirely incapable of missing his individuality and merging himself with the wife, it remains only to the wife to maintain the balance of the conjugal life.

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Women should not do anything that can bring dishonour or infamy on them and their family and a blot on their character. Without character a man or a woman is considered as dead while living. They should be very careful and cautious when they move in society. They should avoid too much talking, too much mixing, guff and giggling. They should always walk in a dignified manner and not with the swinging of the hips. They should never look at man with a flirting gesture. Clothes should not be too tight or revealing.

—*Swami Sivananda*

Mahāvidyās—Goddesses of Tantra

—Dr. Uma Raman Jha

Tantra means *Śāstra*. *Tantra* expounds our knowledge for getting pleasures and bliss.

तन्त्र्यते विस्तार्यते ज्ञानमनेनेति तन्त्रम्।

The devotees of *Śākta Tantra* worship *Mahāvidyās* or Goddesses. There are ten *Mahāvidyās*—

काली तारा महाविद्या षोडशी भुवनेश्वरी।
भैरवी छिन्नमस्ता च विद्या धूमावती तथा॥
बगला सिद्धविद्या च मातङ्गी कमलात्मिका।

Kālī, Tārā, Ṣoḍaśī, Bhuvaneśvarī, Bhairavī, Chinnamastā, Dhūmāvatī, Bagalā, Mātaṅgī and Kamalā are the ten *Mahāvidyās* in *Śākta Tantra*.

Śakti or Goddess is the root of existence of the universe. It is *Śakti* who is creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe. Without the knowledge of *Śakti* liberation is not possible.

शक्तिज्ञानं विना देवि मुक्तिः हास्याय कल्पते।

In the present article a brief description of ten *Mahāvidyās* is given for the general readers.

(1) Kālī—

For gaining spiritual power ten forms of the great Goddess are worshipped by the *Tāntrikas*. They are the manifestations of *Ādyā Śakti*. The chief of the ten *Mahāvidyās* is Kālī. Mahākālī resides in the heart of Mahākāla. She is the first and the foremost Goddess of *Śakti* cult.

According to *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* Kālī is the progenitor of all objects of the world. She assumes various forms holding

various weapons to destroy the evils of the world. Kālī is the consort of Mahākāla, the Eternal Time. She represents *Śakti*, the energy which is the cause of creation and destruction of the universe.

The image of Kālī has a posture indicative of certain movements like the hands being raised, tongue coming out, etc. She is dark in colour which indicates that all contradictions of the universe can merge in her lotus-feet. Her left foot rests on the breast of Śiva. She resides in the cremation ground where worldly objects are reduced to ashes. She possesses red teeth in her open mouth. She grants boon to her devotees. She possesses three eyes. She wears a garland of severed human hands and heads.

The image of Kālī can be considered in the following *Dhyāna Mantra*—

नीलां स्वच्छदिगम्बरां भगवतीं भीमां करालीं शिवां
खड्गं सन्दधतीं परां त्रिनयनां श्रीमुण्डमालाधराम्।
घोरां दुष्टविनाशिनीं शिवमहाकालीं नु दंष्ट्रायुतां
ध्यायेत्तां परमेश्वरीं खलु शवारूढां जगद्व्यापिनीम्॥

(2) Tārā—

Tārā is the second powerful Goddess having dark blue complexion. She places her left foot on the breast of Śiva who lies down like a corpse. She looks terrible. She wears a garland of trunkless human heads on her neck. She is youthful and adorned with *Pañcamudrās* (five postures). Tārā protects her devotees when they cry for help in distress. The *Dhyāna Mantra* of Tārā is as follows—

तारां दुःखहरां परां भगवतीं हुंकारबीजात्मिकां
खड्गेन्दीवरखर्पराभयकरां नागैर्युतां संस्तुताम्।
खर्वां तां नु शवस्थितां भयहरां घोराट्टहासां शिवां
ध्यायेद्दिव्यविशालपिङ्गलजटां तामुग्रतारां शुभाम्॥

Bauddhas also worship Tārā.

(3) Ṣoḍaśī—

Ṣoḍaśī is the Goddess as a young and beautiful girl of

sixteen years. She has four hands holding noose, goad, arrow and bow. She is three-eyed and seated on pedestal comprising of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra, Indra and Sadāśiva. Tripura Sundarī or Bālā Tripura Sundarī is the name of Ṣoḍaśī. Lopāmudrā, Durvāsā and a number of *Siddhas* have become the devotees of Ṣoḍasī. The *Dhyāna Mantra* of Ṣoḍaśī is as follows—

या बालार्कसमा शिवा भगवती दिव्यैश्चतुर्भिः करैः
पाशाभीतिवराङ्कुशान् विदधती नेत्रत्रयोद्भासिता॥
तां विद्यां सुभगां महेशदयितां बालां परामम्बिकां
दिव्यां लोकहितैषिणीं शुभकरीं श्रीषोडशीमाश्रये॥

(4) Bhuvaneśvarī—

Bhuvaneśvarī is a full grown woman whose complexion is like the effulgence of the rising sun. She has put on a crescent on her forehead and a crown on her head. Her breasts are full with milk for *Sādhakas*. She is in a smiling mood. She holds noose and goad in her two hands and in her other two hands she has boons for her devotees. The *Dhyāna Mantra* of Bhuvaneśvarī is as follows—

शक्तिं तां परमेश्वरस्य निखिलां स्मेराननां भास्वती-
मुद्यद्भानुसहस्त्रकान्तिवलितां दिव्याम्बरां मातरम्।
हेमच्छत्रधरां शुभां भगवतीं पर्यङ्कपद्मासनां
वन्देऽहं भुवनेश्वरीं त्रिनयनां शर्वस्य जायां पराम्॥

(5) Chinnamastā—

Chinnamastā is a Goddess whose head is beheaded. She shines as tens of millions of suns together. She is a young lady with heaving and rising breasts. Her mouth is big with the tongue emitting out and the blood gushing forth from her throat. Her hairs are dishevelled and decorated with beautiful flowers. She holds a cutting tool in her right hand. Her left leg is placed a little behind. Her right leg is in front. She has a garland in her neck having trunkless human heads. She remains in a standing posture of Rati and Kāma engaged in sexual embrace. She has two attendants—Dākinī and Varṇinī standing on both

sides who are drinking blood coming out of the neck of the Goddess. Dākinī and Varṇinī are sixteen years old and naked.

The *Dhyāna Mantra* of Chinnamastā is as follows—

दिग्वस्त्रा परमेश्वरी त्रिनयना खड्गेन युक्ता शिवा
या देवी स्वकबन्धशोणितसुधाधारां पिबन्ती मुदा।
नागाबद्धशिरोमणिर्विलसति ध्येया सदा या सुरैः
शक्तिं तां हि परात्परां भगवतीं श्रीछिन्नमस्तां भजे।।

(6) Bhairavī—

Bhairavī is wearing a garland of trunkless human heads. She wears a red silken cloth. Her complexion is red. She has high and round breasts. She holds rosary of beads and a book in two hands and in her other two hands she keeps boons for her devotees. She has a crescent on her forehead. Her three eyes are like three red lotuses. She has a bright smile on her lips. Bhairavī is a powerful deity of *Tāntrika Sādhakas*.

The *Dhyāna Mantra* of Bhairavī is as follows—

देवीं भानुसहस्रकान्तिवलितां विद्यां परां शङ्करीं
स्वर्णच्छत्रविभूषितां त्रिनयनां पद्माननां सुस्मिताम्।
रक्तालिप्तपयोधरां सुमुकुटां धृत्वा शिरोमालिकां
मालापुस्तकधारिणीं भवजयां श्रीभैरवीमाश्रये।।

(7) Dhūmạvatī—

Dhūmāvatī is an ugly form of *Mahāśakti*. She is a tall woman with a big nose, having pale complexion, rough looks depicting her angry mood. She is hungry and thirsty. She is dressed as a widow with dirty clothes and disorderly colourless hairs. She has no teeth. She rides a chariot over which sits a crow. She holds a fan in one hand and the other hand is raised to bless. Dhūmāvatī removes evils of the devotees. *Dhyāna Mantra* of Dhūmāvatī is as follows—

दुर्गम्या मलिनाम्बरा हि विधवा दीर्घापरा चञ्चला
या काकध्वजयुक्तवाहनरथे क्षुत्क्षामकण्ठा स्थिता।
या रूक्षा विरलद्विजा भगवती शूर्पेण युक्ताकरे
शक्तां तां प्रणमामि शत्रुहनने धूमावतीं सर्वदा।।

(8) Bagalāmukhī—

Bagalāmukhī is worshipped to win the cases, to destroy enemies and to be successful in debate and war. She is seated on a throne beset with gems in the midst of ocean of nectar. She has yellow complexion. She wears yellow clothes, garlands and ornaments. She is called *Pītāmbarī*. She holds a mace in her right hand and she catches the tongue of the enemy with her left hand. Devotees worship her with following *Dhyāna*—

पीठे रत्नयुते सदा भगवती हस्तेन जिह्वां रिपो-
र्धृत्वा मुद्गरधारिणी विजयते पीताम्बरा या शिवा।
मालाहारभृता प्रहारकरणे दक्षा परा वैरिषु
सा नित्या परमेश्वरी नु बगला पायाच्चिरं शत्रुतः॥

(9) Mātaṅgī—

Mātaṅgī sits on the throne of valuable gems and stones. She has dark complexion. She wears a crescent on her forehead. She holds noose, goad, sword and *Kheṭaka* in her four hands. She removes evils of the devotees. *Dhyāna Mantra* of Mātaṅgī is as follows—

मातङ्गीं शशिशेखरां त्रिनयनां दीव्यत्किरीटोज्ज्वलां
हस्ताब्जैर्दधतीमसिं सुविमलौ पाशाङ्कुशौ सर्वदा।
पीठे रत्नसमन्विते भगवतीं दिव्याम्बरां संस्थितां
तां देवीं प्रणमामि विश्वजननीं स्वर्गापवर्गप्रदाम्॥

(10) Kamalā—

Kamalā is the 10th form of *Mahāśakti*. She is shining like gold. She is coronated with nectar pouring down from pitchers held by trunks of four heavenly elephants. She holds two lotuses in her two hands and her other two hands are raised for granting boons to devotees. *Dhyāna Mantra* of Kamalā is as follows—

दीव्यद्धाटकसन्निभा सुखकरी सिक्ता चतुर्भिर्गजैः
सानन्दं कलशैः सुवर्णरचितैरासिच्यमाना परा।
हस्तैर्या दधती वराभययुगं रत्नप्रभाभा शुभा
तां देवीं कमलां भजे प्रतिदिनं पद्मां सरोजस्थिताम्॥

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Na Strī Svātantryamarhati

(A Feminine View)

—*Mrs. Uma Ranganathan*

The *Manusmṛti* says—

यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः।

"Where women are honoured there verily the god's dwell."

It is from the same *Manusmṛti* that the male chauvinists extract and misquote the above title implying that, female of the species do not deserve independence at any time. But in actual truth the principle enshrined in *Manusmṛti* exalts the role of women and emphasises the duties of father to protect the daughter, husband to take care of his wife and son to look after the welfare of his mother. The noble command of our religious texts is that women should be treated with honour and respect and at no stage should be left in the lurch to fend for themselves. Instead it is often misinterpreted that Hindu religion expects women to be subordinate and lead a subjugated life.

India has always upheld in theory of the spiritual equality of man and man and man and woman. In the pursuit of knowledge and virtue, in the performance of rituals, even in the harder fields of war and statecraft we find the Vedic woman was a companion and helpmate of man. But in social practice, there has been increasing laxity after the Vedic period, not because of deliberate human choice, but due to the vicissitudes of history. Indian thought views man and woman as pilgrims in search of *Abhyudaya* that is worldly excellence and *Niḥśreyasa* that is spiritual realisation. In the sphere of the pursuit of spiritual realisation both man and woman are identical. But in the sphere of worldly prosperity the status of woman has suffered periodic diminution.

Ruskin's idea that man is the doer, the creator, the discoverer, defender and the warrior and woman is meant for sweet order, management and decision—is fast disappearing. Man for field and woman for hearth—this is no longer universally accepted. Today there is a worldwide awakening and awareness of woman's liberation movement. While the women's lib Slogan in U.S.A. and London is submission of men, in India it has always been just a spontaneous realization of the duties of wives and the rights of husbands. Even *Ṛgveda* recognises manhood of man and womanhood of woman. *Manusmṛti* II says—"A mother's status has been recognised a thousand times higher than that of a father" (145). The values of human life originate from the mother and human life gets its sustenance and substance from her.

But the woman of India has eternally remained too passive and too submissive to assert her dominance. Within her limited circle she is the example of self-transcendence through self-effacement. While everybody proclaims the value of motherhood and praises it from moral, ethical, emotional and social angles, we have failed to bring it under economic parameter.

The male member has commanded more or less same respect and economic status in both matriarchal as well as patriarchal families. But the role of women has been highly discriminated against in patriarchal families. But today with the emergence of nuclear families and a new awareness of the individuality of women, she also plays a crucial role in managing and protecting the family. Moreover, in a money economy, where everything, right from breeding and feeding is getting institutionalised and commercialised, it is easier to calculate woman's potential in economic terms. Her productive capacity is valuable to her family members even though she may not be exchanging it for monetary returns. The fact that she is toiling far in excess of what is needed for her self-maintenance creates an economic value to her role in life.

After three decades, women's movement is beginning to have an impact in changing the power balance in male-female relationships. The present-day woman is brave and emotionally ambitious. She may appear to be self-centred, but she takes the responsibility for her own happiness. Her demands are just and optimism runs strong through the movement.

The world at large has come to realise that it is not masculine to be independent and assertive, but human and that every human being needs the satisfaction of achievement.

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सम्राज्ञी श्वसुरे भव सम्राज्ञी श्वश्र्वां भव।
ननान्दरि सम्राज्ञी भव सम्राज्ञी अधि देवृषु॥

"Become a queen to your father-in-law; become a queen to your mother-in-law; become a queen to the sisters of your husband and your sisters-in-law juniors and seniors. Have control over them through your enchantingly good behaviours."

—*Rgveda* (X.85.46)

Socrates had a wife, the most undesirable in the world. One day he was thinking very deeply, was philosophising and his wife, as was her wont, approached him and spoke in very harsh, rough language; she reviled and insulted him and called him names; she demanded his attention; she asked him to attend to her to do this and that thing; but Socrates went on philosophising. His method was never to leave a problem until it was solved.

The wife roared and stormed at him, and still he did not listen. Then getting enraged, she took up a basin filled with dirty water and poured it upon his head. Was Socrates ruffled or annoyed ? Not in the least. He smiled and laughed and said—"Today is proven the saying 'Oft-times when it roars it rains."

—*Swami Rama Tirtha*

Women in the Smṛti Books

Once a jurist proclaimed—"Law is nothing but the common sense codified." What is this common sense? It is a common trait of thinking by the society. Since the thinking pattern of society changes from time to time due to the changing circumstances, phenomenal happenings and expected or unexpected occurrences in the society, so whenever the deviation from the standard in the thinking and behavioural pattern of the society becomes glaring enough, the codes also change accordingly. In the recent years, due to the humanitarian thinking, our criminal laws underwent a considerable change. Almost all over the world in the secular countries, capital punishment has been abolished to a very great extent if not altogether. Death sentences by our courts of law have become very rare. The modern social conditions are entirely different from what they have been a couple of millennia before. Social life is just like a river that changes its course from time to time; somewhere and sometimes it looks tiny while when it reaches the sea it is so big and so vast. In the rainy season its furious form and nature is worth seeing. Similarly the society and its course of life changes, caused by so many factors.

We commit a great mistake when we try to judge our past with the norms and standards of modernity. As a matter of fact we are a gift of entirely different social atmosphere and thus unable to appreciate the past—its conditions thinking and behaviour unconcernedly and neutrally. For example we cannot even think of putting our wives as a wager in a gambling game.

Just before a few centuries slavery was a common thing prevailing as a global affair. But what about now? On that basis we should not entertain the idea that the society and its members were cruel and inhuman. It is true that the treatment meted out to the slaves was inhuman and worse than beastly, but it was a social norm. Eventhough criticising and condemning, we should study and analyse the social behaviour putting ourselves in the same social atmosphere. In my opinion it will be more rational to say that the particular society behaved like this and that. That is all. It is not only unnecessary but unjust also to condemn the predecessors of the modern age.

A law-giver frames his laws adjustable to the then social pattern. It is obligatory on his part and a moral duty also. When we read that some *Smṛti* book prescribes a rule of behaviour then we should think and feel that it was the norm of that society—a rule followed by all and not an order from an authority.

Whatever strictures we pass on the *Smṛtis* and their authors it is mostly erroneous and it has become a fashion. Whosoever speak such irresponsible things, are generally unfamiliar with the contents of the *Smṛtis*. There are generally three things which are most criticised—

(1) Women do not deserve freedom.

(2) They deserve chastisement every now and then.

(3) They are incapable of discharging any responsible duty of some importance.

We will discuss them one by one. Firstly we take the case of "न स्त्री स्वातन्त्र्यमर्हति". In my opinion all the criticisers have misappreciated it. We shall discuss later on that all the *Smṛtis* without exception entertain a very high opinion for the women. If it means the same as we think it means, and criticise, well, it goes against all other expressions scattered in all the *Smṛti* books. This expression simply means that they should never be left unprotected alone. Even these days we cannot say that such types of expressions are wrong. A sincere and serious man

always will think that a woman requires a protecting hand. We very often read in the newspapers regarding incidents of sexual rape and molestation whether it is by police or antisocial elements. What happened at the time of bifurcation of the country; how many ladies were molested, how many girls and women were kidnapped and abducted, who can tell? People of the past generation still shiver and shudder when they think of the cruelty perpetrated to them.

Now we come to the point of the ladies deserving chastisement. Two very common quotations are given by the criticisers of the *Smṛtis*—

शूद्राश्च पशवो दासा मूर्खाश्च पटहाः स्त्रियः।
ताडिता मार्दवं यान्ति न ते सत्कारभाजनम्॥

It is this verse that was translated by Tulasīdāsa in his *Rāmacaritamānasa* as—

ढोल गवाँर सूद्र पसु नारी। सकल ताड़ना के अधिकारी॥

(V. 58.6)

It is rather the most objectionable statement to the modern mind and people are trying to change the meaning of the word 'ताडन'. Here it is my humble suggestion that firstly such expressions we will not find in *Smṛti* books. Secondly whenever and in whatever circumstances these verses were composed it must have been the common attitude of the society and particularly the ascetic devotees in whose eyes womanly charm was the greatest impediment in their spiritual discipline. Even Lord Śiva was allured by the charm of Mohinī. So in my opinion it should not be taken to be the social truth of the time. "न ते सत्कारभाजनम्" is quite eloquent and closes the doors for the neo-commentators of today.

Thirdly ladies are now given preference in the recruitment in every field of service. They are holding responsible posts in administrative and even defence services. But still it cannot be denied that they are tender by nature and to a very great extent incapable of going through hard manual labour. No doubt

we talk of Durgā, Lakṣmībāī, Durgāvatī and Cinnammā of Kerala etc., and in present age we had and still have many ladies at the head of the nations and they cannot be overlooked as weaklings. In our country we had Indirā Gāndhī who succeeded in doing what her illustrious father Paṇḍita Neharū could not. There are so many things listed to her credit. Still there is the question about the number of the ladies. They can be counted on the finger-tips and treated as exceptions. The emotional nature of the ladies in general is a universal feature. That too is sometimes a hurdle in their way. And lastly they have got to perform the most important duty and that is to give birth to the children, to nurse them, to feed them and to make them useful and worthy citizens of the world. Is there any duty more important than this one? Can men do this job? We have got to agree willingly or unwillingly that men can never perform any womanly duty while certain selected women eventhough negligible in number, can successfully do the manual jobs. Employed ladies barring a few on very high posts, cannot afford to employ servants to look after their domestic duties. So when they come from their work-place all domestic jobs wait for them. After the whole day's tiring labour the kitchen appears horrible to them. Still they have got to do this in addition to entertain their husbands. By the time they become free from these duties, they are exhausted and completely broken. It has been observed that in certain families where husband and wife both are employed, cooking is done only once in a week. They somehow pull on only with the help of refrigeration. In such cases is it possible to live a happy domestic life? Being an I. A. S. does not mean that their motherly instinct has deserted them. It should never be forgotten that they are born mothers.

Now we will discuss the general attitude towards women in the *Smṛti* books and we will find that *Smṛtis* provide a very respectful place for them. What is more important is that there is no difference of opinion on this point between any two

Smṛtis. The general attitude of the *Smṛtis* is as follows—

A lady during the period of her menstruation becomes untouchable. Sin occurs if somebody touches her. After this one is required to take bath ten or eleven times. If the discharge continues for more than it is due because of some disease the lady is no more untouchable. Like all other *Smṛti* writers Aṅgirā is also in favour of sexual chastity. It is a must. He prescribes *Cāndrāyaṇa* for a person who eats food touched by an unchaste and overstepping woman. An issueless lady is inauspicious. If somebody takes meal in the house prepared by her, he goes to hell but at the same time Aṅgirā is very particular on the point that nobody should forcibly take her wealth or property or clothings. If somebody does it, he is sure to go to hell. Like other law-givers Aṅgirā is also very rigid to disallow touching a *Cāṇḍāla* woman in any condition. If somebody touches a *Cāṇḍāla* woman he should, as a token of *Prāyaścitta*, touch gold, water brought during the daytime, take bath with the same water and drink it. Atri maintains that women are always pure by nature. He says—

न स्त्री दुष्यति जारेण ब्राह्मणोऽवेदकर्मणा।
नाऽपो मूत्रपुरीषाभ्यां नाग्निर्दहनकर्मणा॥
पूर्वं स्त्रियः सुरैर्भुक्ताः सोमगन्धर्ववह्निभिः।
भुञ्जते मानवाः पश्चान्नता दुष्यन्ति कर्हिचित्॥

(*Atri Smṛti* 193-194)

"A woman is not contaminated or impure by being enjoyed by a person other than her husband. Similarly a brahman doing something prohibited by *Vedas* or waters by the stool or urine or fire by burning impure things, do not get contaminated." For example he says—"In ancient days ladies were enjoyed by gods and demigods like Soma, *Gandharvas* and fire-god. After that human beings as husbands used them. But their sanctity was preserved." He further says—If a lady conceives from an *Asavarṇa* person she too gets sanctified after the delivery and particularly when she is free from the next menstruation. She is as pure

as gold." Atri and Devala, both are of the opinion that if a lady is raped forcibly she should not be divorced because after the menstruation she will be pure as usual (*Devala Smṛti* 48—52).

Laghuśaṅkha Smṛti says that mother is given first preference while offering *Piṇḍa* to the manes. *Śātātapa Smṛti* says—"If there is a person who kills a woman or deceives her, he should practise *Taptakṛcchra* for six months. Without that there is no other way to expiate himself. Gobhila and Āśvalāyana, like other law-givers are very emphatic that without wife no sacrificial ritual can be performed or an oblation can be offered. Gobhila refers to the *Aśvamedha* performed by Rāma and declares a wife to be indispensable on any such occasion.

Now we will look into what the best law-giver of the world of his time—Manu says about the status of woman in the Hindu society. Manu seems to be most liberal and generous to the women and has a very high opinion of them. His "न स्त्री स्वातन्त्र्यमर्हति" is an expression oft-quoted by not only the modern criticisers but various *Smṛtis* and scriptural literature also. Manu is also rigid on the point of Pativratahood. Like Devala etc., he does not seem to adopt a compromising attitude. Otherwise whatever he wrote about women, it all goes in their favour only. In my humble opinion these two also are not the points to be disagreed upon. Any sensible Indian if not blinded by the Western dazzling light, will agree that neither women should be left unprotected nor they should visit persons other than the husband. Manu is very much aware of the sex appeal and attraction which the women possess. That is why he disbelieves male members more than the female ones and in no uncertain words he prescribes that a man must not be in the company of even mother, sister and daughter while in solitude. It is this sex attraction which motivated the later authors to opine as 'अवगुन मूल सूलप्रद प्रमदा सब दुख खानि' (*Mānasa* III. 44).

In all other fields Manu provided as much protection to the women as any civilized society can do even in the modern age.

After all what is our personal law? It is all based on the *Smṛti* books. The so-called 'Hindu Code Bill' only violated the *Smṛtis* in regard to the conception of *Pātivrata* rules. No new protection has been provided which Manu did not provide. Manu is against the selling of daughters. He is opposed to demand anything from the groom side. He provides full rights to the women to have their property independently. He says—"Those cousins who forcefully take possession of the property of a woman during her lifetime, should be punished by the king just like thieves. In the other world they go to hell" (*Manusmṛti* VIII. 29, 352). An issueless lady without any male protector is the social responsibility. Every member of the society must provide protection to her (VIII. 28). If a person is required to commit a murder where protection of a woman or a brahman is involved, he must not hesitate even from killing. There occures no sin. About "स्त्री धन" (the property of the wife) Manu says—

(1) Whatever she gets from her parents at the time of marriage.
(2) Whatever she gets from the parents or brothers at the time of departing from her parental home.
(3) Gifts from the husband.
(4) After the marriage gift from the father.
(5) Gift from the mother.
(6) Gift from the brothers on different occasions.

Manu recognises the above-mentioned six types as 'स्त्री धन' exclusively. Apart from that she had equal right over the earnings of the husband. It is not at all necessary to refer to the sayings like "यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते.....". It is common knowledge.

In the end the authors of the *Smṛti* books have given a very realistic assessment of the domestic and conjugal life. Dakṣa writes—"If the wife is agreeable, sweet-tongued, skilled, gentle, faithful and not self-exhibiting, she is a goddess, not a human being (IV.3). The home where such couples abide is undoubtedly a heaven. In the same way where the wife is unpropitious and disagreeable that home is decidedly a hell (IV.4). Even in

heaven it is difficult to find such conjugal affection (IV.5). People desire household life for comforts. Wife is the very root of the comfortable life. Only that woman can be called a *Patnī* who is disciplined, who cares always for what the husband requires or desires and is well-subordinated to him. Dakṣa seems to have realised the inconveniences and troubles of bigamy. So he says—"द्विदारस्य विशेषत:" (IV.7). If the wife happens to be wicked, according to Dakṣa she is worse than a leech. A very realistic assessment indeed.

It is not possible to cover all the *Smṛtis* and what their authors said, in such a small article. But whatever little has been said above, will make it very clear that it is very incorrect on the part of so-called Western-minded persons to blame the *Smṛtis* and their authors and make them responsible for the present miserable condition of women in the society. We may rest assured that whatever these people talk, they talk only in the air. They have never taken trouble to go through the *Smṛti* books.

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य: स्वनारीं परित्यज्य निर्दोषां कुलसंभवाम्।
परदाररतो हि स्यादन्यां वा कुरुते स्त्रियम्॥
सोऽन्यजन्मनि देवेशि स्त्री भूत्वा विधवा भवेत्।

"A person who abandons his wife who is flawless in her conduct and belongs to a high family; indulges with wives of other persons or marries another lady, becomes in his next life a woman and attains widowhood. O Goddess."

—*Skandapurāṇa*

Woman is a flower that breathes its perfume in the shade only.

—*Lamenneis*

Na Strī Svātantryamarhati

—C. S. Mahadevan

I refer to the most controversial and most debatable point dealing with women's independence based on *Śloka* of *Manusmṛti* deliberately misunderstood, misinterpreted and consistently misapplied in ridiculing the great law-giver Manu. The impugned *Śloka* (*Śloka* 3, ninth chapter) reads—

पिता रक्षति कौमारे भर्ता रक्षति यौवने।
रक्षन्ति स्थविरे पुत्रा न स्त्री स्वातन्त्र्यमर्हति॥

In the context of the word 'रक्षति' repeated thrice, the basic idea is about economic or personal needs, safety, security, etc., and not freedom as maliciously interpreted by persons hostile to *Sanātana Dharma*. The word 'अर्हति' has various shades of meaning such as, fit for, rightly so, deserving, fit or to be burdened with. Women's role in human society, as per sage Manu, having been assigned a high degree of seriousness, importance and exclusivity, he means, she should not be put to the necessity of having to work for her livelihood or herself look after or provide for personal security and safety. The meaning of a word is to be finalised firstly with reference to its literal meaning, secondly contextual and thirdly with reference to and in coherence with what is the import of the *Śloka* itself and those before and after. To let women have absolute freedom from worry and anxiety about their personal needs, the other members of the family should take care and are answerable.

This provision was necessary in recognition of the important role women have to play in their life, i. e., bringing up the children and manage the household, to ensure that children, who

ultimately constitute the citizenry of a nation are given the required basic grounding in moral, ethical, devotional values, duties to parents, elders, teachers, relatives, neighbours and the community, environment, country, education, health awareness etc., etc. For example let us take child labour. Our politicians, why—all politicians all over the world, social reformers and various leaders of allied institutions related to child welfare all loudly proclaim at the top of their voice that child labour is admittedly bad, a sad state of affairs and should be banned.

Now the child is supposed to spend his childhood, boyhood and adolescence solely in and for education and the full responsibility to keep children absolutely free in their pursuit of studies is of the parents or other close relatives. On the contrary, if the conditions in a society are such that the child is to work for his food and in some pathetic cases for the whole family, how can he play his role, i. e., to engage himself solely in studies. Likewise if a woman has to work and earn and maintain herself she will have no time or stamina to take care of the children, who will consequently be indisciplined, wayward, become prone to vicious inclinations or become victims of unscrupulous employers and create serious problems for the society including juvenile criminality, sex aberration, etc.

It is conceded that, in case of genuine adverse circumstances, a woman may have to earn herself and the *Manusmṛti* is not against it, for, all the *Sanātana Dharma* codes allow enough leeway for adjustment/relaxation according to time, place, needs, inevitability etc., etc. Much in the same way, where women are intelligent, studious clever in various arts, there is no restriction in extending their activities beyond the household. All the while she should not be put up with the burden or be under compulsion to earn her livelihood.

The other question, as a corollary is—what is women's role in the modern concept. This is a controversy, rather it should form the subject matter under some wider title.

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A Tribute to Our Mothers

—S. P. Kamath

'जननी जन्मभूमिश्च स्वर्गादपि गरीयसी'

We are sure we shall never see
A poem of pity in our mothers all;
Souls whose kindness is never lost
For kinder than mother earth's love.
Our mothers who are goddesses all
With motherland greater than heaven are;
Who all day long toil with rare tact
Unmurmuring, ungrudging, unhonoured, unsung.
A brood of children who do not care
A husband harsh, unkind and unfair,
A struggling soul she is in all homes
Unmindful of slights, pains and cares;
Goes on happily and lightly with her daily chores
A living goddess who treads the earth.
What we are and what we would be
We owe all to her endless grace.
A love undemanding and unasked given
By all of her kind in god's creation.
Glory be to God on high
For creating such selfless souls
As he cannot at all times be ever near
Created mothers to succour and care.
To heal, to love, to nurse, to rear
In nature's strange unbounding *Līlā* here,
Is there any other person—O friend,
More humble, kind and rare?

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Female Education in Our Sacred Literature

—Dr. Ramkrishna Saraf

Women in our country have been very highly honoured right from the Vedic age. They enjoyed respectful status in the family as well as in the society. Equal opportunities for both, boys and girls in the family were open for the development of their personality. In the area of education too, the girls at par with the boys, enjoyed equal treatment. In ancient India education meant the Vedic education. It was meant for all those who were to take part in the Vedic sacrifice irrespective of their sex.

In the Vedic period women were regarded competent for studying the Vedic literature and participating in the sacrifice. No one could recite Vedic prayers or perform Vedic sacrifice without undergoing the *Upanayana* ritual. This suggests that the *Upanayana* was an obligatory ritual for the girls in the Vedic period as it was for boys.

पुरा कल्पे तु नारीणां मौञ्जीबन्धनमिष्यते।

After the *Upanayana Saṁskāra* the girls used to go to the *Gurukula* for their Vedic education.

There were no child-marriages in the Vedic period. Generally the girls were married at the age of 16 or 17, after completing their education. A few of them could continue their studies even after that age and were married after their education was over. There were still others, who would prefer not to marry at all, remain unmarried throughout and would devote their life in spiritual pursuits. They were known as *Brahmavādinīs*. Thus the position of female education in that period was most elevated. In *Ṛgveda* we find many hymns

which have been ascribed to female Vedic seers. Some well-known amongst them, famous for their spiritual/philosophical attainments are Ghoṣā, Lopāmudrā, Romaśā and Apālā. This clearly indicates that the standard of female education during that period was very high and excellent.

In *Yajurveda* we find that women did not lag behind in the field of education. After completing their education, they discharged their duty of spreading the education amongst the women in the society. In the *Yajurveda*, it has been desired that women may attain the best education. Their progeny may be well-educated and learned. It has been said in the *Yajurveda* that a child born of a learned mother is always happy in life.

आवित्तादितिरुरुशर्मा।

(*Yajurveda* X.9)

This *Veda* holds that women are eligible to teach the *Vedas*. The educated women shared the responsibilities of their husbands. They also discharged their household duties. In the *Yajurveda*, we find that the women effulgent with the Vedic knowledge enjoyed the exalted position.

The *Atharvaveda* speaks high of the maidens, who observed *Brahmacarya* discipline. It says—"ब्रह्मचर्येण कन्या युवानं विन्दते पतिम्।" (XI. 5.18). This indicates that the maidens in that age used to observe the vow of celibacy during the period of their education. The *Atharvaveda* pays high compliments to the women who were deeply engaged in learning.

शुद्धाः पूता योषितो यज्ञिया इमा आपश्चरुमव सर्पन्तु शुभ्राः।

(*Ibid.* XI. 1.17)

In the *Brāhmaṇa* period also the women enjoyed high status. They used to perform the sacrifice occupying their seat by the side of their husbands. In the *Mantra* "अयज्ञो वा एषः योऽपत्नीकः" in the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*, we notice that the *Yajamāna* without his wife was not eligible to perform the sacrifice. This also suggests that women in that period enjoyed equal standing and that they prosecuted their education on equal footing with the males.

In the Upanishadic age, women began to take interest in philosophy. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (II. 4.23) we find that Maitreyī, the wife of the celebrated sage Yājñavalkya exhibited her keenness to study the great problem of metaphysics viz., the immortality, rather than showing interest in the worldly riches.

In another instance in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (III.6.1) Gārgī, a lady philosopher—asked Yājñavalkya a very subtle philosophical question. The sage thereupon advised her in her interest not to insist on that question and on the advice of the sage, Gārgī agreed to withdraw. The dialogue between the sage Yājñavalkya and the great thinker Gārgī showed that she was a philosopher of very high order. These instances suggest that the woman-education during the Upanishadic period attained heights *par-excellence*.

During the epic period also we meet ladies of the royal families who were not simply educated, but learned and well-versed in the Vedic *Mantras*. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, we find that Kausalyā was well-versed in the Vedic *Mantras*. The day when the coronation of her son Śrī Rāma, was to take place, she was seen in the morning worshipping the Lord Viṣṇu and offering oblations into the sacrificial fire, for the welfare of her beloved son (*Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa* XX.14-15).

In the *Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa* again, when Śrī Rāma was to proceed to the forest for fourteen years, Sītā requested Śrī Rāma to take her to the forest with him. But Śrī Rāma did not agree. Thereupon the way Sītā pleaded her case, confirms that she was a lady of strong determination and unsurmountable confidence and was well-possessed of excellent arguing ability.

साहं त्वया गमिष्यामि वनमद्य न संशयः।
नाहं शक्या महाभाग निवर्तयितुमुद्यता॥

(*Ibid.* 27.15)

This indicates, that Sītā was extraordinarily learned having sound command over many disciplines.

In *Mahābhārata* we find Kuntī versed in the use of the Atharva-

vedic *Mantras* which were kindly granted to her by a great Vedic Brahmin in token of the service to him rendered by Kuntī.

ततस्तामनवद्याङ्गीं ग्राहयामास स द्विजः।
मन्त्रग्रामं तदा राजन्नथर्वशिरसि श्रुतम्॥

(*Vana Parva* 305. 20)

This again shows that in the *Mahābhārata* also the virgins/ ladies were well-equipped with knowledge of the Vedic *Mantras* and the use thereof.

In classical literature we notice a few instances of co-education. In the *Abhijñāna Śākuntalam* drama of Kālidāsa we meet Śārṅgarava and Śāradvata, the two prominent disciples of the sage Kaṇva. We also meet Śakuntalā the fondle daughter of the sage and her two close associates Anasūyā, Priyaṁvadā. Their association suggests that they must be receiving their education together at the *Āśrama*. We find in the act III of the drama, Śakuntalā writing a letter to the king Duṣyanta. This also supports that Śakuntalā received her educational instructions of the *Āśrama*. It also speaks that both male and female students were studying together at the *Āśrama*. In the *Uttararāmacarita* of Bhavabhūti we find Ātreyī a female student, receiving her education together with Kuśa and Lava at the *Āśrama* of the sage Vālmīki. In the *Mālatīmādhava* also we notice Kāmandakī *Parivrājikā* receiving her education together with the male scholars. These instances suggest the existence of co-education in the classical period.

There were some accomplished ladies in the field of philosophy also. Bhāratī, wife of Maṇḍana Miśra (8 CAO) the great *Mīmāṁsaka* was a versatile genius in *Mīmāṁsā Vedānta* and literature. She had the privilege of officiating as a judge in the philosophical debate of the two celebrated scholars of the time viz. Śaṅkarācārya and Maṇḍana Miśra. The impartial judgement that she delivered at the end of the intellectual encounter is a landmark in the history of Indian Philosophy and has no match anywhere in the world.

It is clear therefore that women in the past were getting highest education here. It is natural to suppose that some of the ladies took up the teaching profession too. The word *Upādhyāyā* in the *Vārtika* on the *Sūtra* (4.1.49) of Pāṇini supports this view—

यातु स्वयमेवाध्यापिका तत्र वा ङीष् वाच्यः। उपाध्यायी, उपाध्याया।

Thus we notice that the position of women education in ancient India has been remarkably commendable. The women in this country in ancient days were privileged to receive Vedic education and participate in the Vedic sacrifices. There have been great female Vedic seers like Ghoṣā, Lopāmudrā, Apālā and others in the Vedic period, great lady-philosophers like Maitreyī and Gārgī in the Upanishadic period and in the early Christian era great philosopher umpires like Bhāratī. There have been women teachers too who were dedicated to the cause of education. This is something our country can be always proud of.

But, gradually a decay in the women education in the country crept in. By and by the *Upanayana* ritual was denied to the girls, and Vedic *Mantra* were withdrawn, and by the 19th century the women were completely deprived of the privilege of education. The reason assigned to this was the belief that a girl if taught to read and write might become a widow soon after her marriage! This superstition prevailed in the country for quite a long time. But, with the passage of time, the situation changed again. Gradually women education revived. In the present century we find girls/women highly educated/highly posted/highly placed in the society. But, the form of education is changed. It is devoid of, the real spirit of the past soul of the country. It is devoid of our old cultural heritage. It is rich in information about science and technology no doubt, but lacks in the moral values, our ancient treasure and the very mainstay of our great nation.

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Female Education—Swāmī Vivekānanda

—Dr. Amulya Mohapatra

Advaita Vedānta proclaimed that One Supreme Being pervades the entire universe and that the spirit knows no distinctions of caste, creed or sex. It is very difficult to understand why in this country so much difference is made between men and women. In the period of degradation, when the priests made the other castes incompetent to study *Vedas*, it is said they deprived the women also of all their rights. In the Vedic and Upanishadic age Maitreyī, Gārgī and other ladies of ancient India have taken the place of saints and seers. They have equal access to the knowledge of the scriptures and could pursue hard path of *Sādhanā* to attain the highest knowledge as men could do. It is even said that women were respected and were considered to be the life partners in all activities of men, material and spiritual. In fact, woman was a *Sahadharmiṇī*.

At the same time the women have been treated in all countries as mere manufacturing machines and slaves. According to Swāmī Vivekānanda if you do not raise the women, who are the living embodiment of the Divine Mother, do not think that you have any other way to rise. All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. That country and that nation which does not respect women has never become great, nor will ever be in future. The principal reason why our race has so much degenerated is that you have no respect for these living images of *Śakti*. Manu says—"Where women are respected, there the gods delight, and where they are not, there all works and efforts come to naught." There is no hope of rise

for that family or country where they live in sadness.

To Swāmī Vivekānanda, it is only the education, which can solve all the problems of women. Daughters should be supported and educated with as much care and attention as the sons. Educate your women first and leave them to themselves then they will tell you what reforms are necessary for them. Swāmījī said—"We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet. There is only one purpose in the whole of life—education."

Swāmījī foresaw the women of the future who would receive full education in science and sports, but with an equal or more emphasis on ancient spirituality. They would be in a position to make their own decision and solve their problems in their own way. He dreamt of each individual woman reinstating into herself the greatness of all the women of the Indian past.

Female education should be spread with religion as its centre. All other training should be secondary to religion. Religious training, the formation of character and observation of the vows of celibacy—these should be attended to. Our Hindu women easily understand what chastity means, because it is their heritage. The women of India must grow and develop in the footprints of Sītā. Sītā is unique. She is the very type of the true Indian woman, for all the Indian ideals of a perfect woman have grown out of that one life of Sītā. The race that produced Sītā even if it only dreamt of her has a reverence for woman that is unmatched on the earth, proclaimed Swāmī Vivekānanda.

The role of the woman has been clarified by Swāmī Vivekānanda as that of a mother, a wife, and a daughter as against the Western concept of wifehood as the ideal of womanhood. The ideal woman in India is the mother, the mother first, and the mother last. She is the ideal of the Oriental woman. The very word mother is held to be sacred, and good men offer it to good women for their protection and honour. As Swāmījī

said—"The ideal of womanhood.....is motherhood that marvellous, unselfish, all suffering, ever forgiving mother.....the mother is the ideal of love, she rules the family, she possesses the family."

Swāmī Vivekānanda has planned for woman-upliftment and said that a girl should be taught literature, *Saṁskṛta*, grammar, English as well as the rules of domestic work and bringing up of children, alongwith *Japa*, meditation and prayer. Sports, gardening and care of animals were also emphasized. He inspired young girls to develop the qualities of strength, feminine softness and sweetness but without self advertisement or over emotion. History and *Purāṇas*, house-keeping and the arts, the duties of home life and the principles that make for the development of character have to be taught. Alongwith other things they should acquire the spirit of valour and heroism. In the present-day it has become necessary for them also to learn self-defence how grand was the queen of Jhansi.

Swāmī Vivekānanda once wrote to Josephine Macleod—"The natural ambition of a woman is through marriage to climb up leaning on a man; but those days are gone. You shall be great without the help of any man, just as you are." Swāmījī was convinced of the need for the feminine *Śakti* to mould future Indian society. Thus he wrote a letter to Sister Niveditā—"Let me tell you frankly that I am now convinced that you have a great future in the work for India. What was wanted was not a man, but a woman; a real lioness, to work for the Indians, women specially." So also to improve the condition of woman in India, he wrote to his brother disciple Śaśi in 1895:'There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing.' Our part of the duty lies in imparting true education to all men and women in society. As an outcome of that education they will of themselves be able to know what is good for them and what is bad, and will spontaneously eschew the latter. It will not be then necessary to pull down

or set up anything in society by coercion. Their education must be an eye-opener in all matters.

Swāmījī said that ideal characters must always be presented before the view of the girls to imbue them with a devotion to lofty principles of selflessness. The noble examples of Sītā, Sāvitrī, Damayantī, Līlāvatī, Khannā and Mīrā Bāī should be brought home to their minds, and they should be brought home to their own lives in the light of these.

'The end of all education, all training, should be man-making' said Swāmījī. A nation is advanced in proportion as education and intelligence spread the masses. Every nation, every man and every woman must work out their own salvation. Give them ideas, said Swāmī Vivekānanda, that is the only help they require and then rest must follow as effect. The duty of ours is to put the chemicals together, the crystallization comes in the law of nature.

Swāmījī thought no society could prosper if it neglected its women. He wanted Indian women to receive equal opportunities for education as men. As regards education, Swāmījī said education should be 'character building' and 'man-making', and not merely stuffing the mind with information.

Swāmījī's great confidence in women was evident from his utterance that there was no task before India which could compare with that of women's education. He believed that 'with five hundred men, the conquest of India might take fifty years; with as many women, not more than a few weeks.' The position of women throughout the world from the beginning of history revels the revolutionary nature of Swāmījī's statement that "Perfect womanhood is perfect independence." In order to provide perfect womanhood and perfect independence to women the perfect education must be given to the women or else our nation cannot progress. Swāmījī's dream of such woman for the future Indian society has probably been fulfilled to some extent and his vision of womenhood would be realised in future.

Women's Education

—Prof. K. L. Bhalla

President Dr. Śaṅkara Dayāla Śarmā while inaugurating the "Education for all summit" quoted a Chinese saying—"If you are thinking of the year, plant rice, if you are thinking of a decade, plant trees, if you are thinking of a century educate the people." Special care is required towards the education of women to enable them to attain their full potential.

Education and empowerment of girls and women were put on the top of global agenda in the Delhi declaration of the 'Education for all summit' held in New Delhi sometime back. India has been making consistent efforts to tackle women's education. Attempts have been made in all these years of planned development to enrole more girls in schools. Though female literacy has gone up from 7.9% in 1951 to 39% in 1991, the absolute number of female illiterates has gone up substantially as a result of increase in population.

According to Federico Mayor, Director General, UNESCO, India was well on its way towards achieving universal primary education for all by the year 2000. Praising India's achievement in eradicating illiteracy totally in Kerala, Pondicherry, Wardha and other places, he expressed the hope that the same could be achieved in other regions as well. There are no instant solutions to illiteracy but with suitable motivation and instruction, it has been found that adults can attain full literacy in less than a year's time. In this, radio and television can play an important role.

In fact, radio has been supplementing literacy in several countries of the world because of its wide coverage. The Project

Radio Education for adult literacy was conceived in India in 1989 and set in motion during 1990-91. It was an innovative experiment with a view to gleaming the efficiency of radio as a tool of literacy. Women were the intended beneficiaries and the learning package has been prepared with care—an engaging mixture of music, drama and local idiom.

The factors responsible for the slow progress of girls education were analysed by the committee on the status of women in India which submitted its report in Dec. 1974, the National Plan of Action for women prepared by the Department of Social Welfare in the wake of the International Women's year, 1975, the National Education Policy, 1986 and more recently, National Perspective Plan for Women (1988—2000). This plan has suggested several measures to tackle the problem of the enrolement of girls and the unhealthy trend of drop outs. It appeals to the media to do their best to promote awareness among the masses so that they realise the importance of girls' education. Other agencies that could be helpful in this regard are the local leaders, voluntary agencies, *Mahilā Maṇḍalas* and *Pañcāyats*. Early childhood education or pre-primary education through the vast network of *Bālavāḍīs* and strengthening the Integrated Child Development Services would go a long way in helping solve the problem of school drop outs at the primary stage and beyond.

Some of the other major recommendations of the National Perspective Plan are provision of adequate teaching materials in schools to make learning more attractive. In Orissa all jobs of primary teachers are reserved for women. Many steps are being taken at the central and state levels to check girl drop outs. The National Council of Educational Research and Training has taken up several schemes such as Early Child Education Project, Non-formal Education Project and the Primary Curriculum Renewal Project, all meant to make education more relevant to children from the educationally backward areas.

The aim of women's education should be to fit women for

independent careers. Marriage should not be the sole aim of their lives. If education does not lead to women's economic independence, it will have been wasted. Plato and Voltaire, giants of intellect, thought that women were equals of men in everything except physical strength. It is being increasingly recognised that educated wives and mothers are an asset to a nation and neither expense nor effort should be spared to make female education popular and even compulsory. It has been decided as a national policy that non-formal education on a massive scale should be introduced for girls in the age group of 15—25. Millions of our rural girls do not as yet have a chance to receive primary education. Voluntary organisations should take up the campaign for literacy among women.

Education given to girls ought to be strictly in accordance with their needs. No matter what other subjects they are taught—cooking, music, painting and hygiene should receive a special emphasis. Girls have a special aptitude for paediatrics, nursing, child psychology, nutrition, home economics, mothercraft and interior decoration. They should be trained for domestic life. Ample opportunities should exist for them to learn the arts of dancing, music and painting.

In Maharashtra, there is a wonderful scheme called Sāvitrībāi Phule Foster Parent Scheme which helps girls of poorer families to complete at least primary school education. Under this plan, well-to-do parents and organisations are persuaded to adopt one or more school girls and contribute in cash or kind or both for their education. Another scheme introduced in 1989 provides a marriage grant of Rs. 5000/- to girls coming from poorer families.

Technology is to be harnessed to meet the varied educational needs of women. Modern inventions have made reaching remote corners and providing good quality education to all possible. Education of women should generate awareness of values and attitudes, which determine the health and progress of a nation. Broadly speaking, women's education is closely interlinked with our battles against rural poverty and ignorance of the parents.

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great heroes are sons of great mothers

Women as Promoters of Spirituality

—Swami Rama Tirtha

It is the mothers who can raise the whole world; it is the mothers who can make the country rise or fall; it is the mothers who can make the tide of nature ebb and low. It is always the great heroes who are the sons of great mothers. If these truths are instilled into the child in its infancy, if the realization of the true Self is instilled into the child in its infancy, it may grow to be a Kṛṣṇa or a Christ.

Mothers may spoil the nature of their children, or raise and elevate it. This is the mother's part. You have heard of the Spartan mother having said to her son who was about to go to the battlefield, "Come either with the shield or upon the shield, come not without it. Come to me either alive or dead, but never come defeated."

There was a queen in India, who shut the gates of the city against her husband when he returned defeated. She sent this word to him—"Go away, you traitor, you are not my husband, you have allowed yourself to be defeated. I know you no longer, go away, you are not my husband."

Here is the story of an Indian queen who took a vow of seeing that all her children were perfect. She took the vow of making all her children free from transmigration. The one goal and object of the mothers in India is to make their children free from transmigration. A man of realization is a free soul and is never born again. She also took the vow of making all her territories filled with men of realization, with God-men.

She also wanted to make all her subjects God-men. This

was one vow by one mother and she succeeded. Her sons were God-men, they were Kṛṣṇas, Buddhas, philosophical men, men of renunciation and they ruled the whole community; all her subjects were made free. One woman did that; and what was her process? She used to sing to her children while very young, she used to sing to her children while she nursed them at her bosom, she used to instil into them with her milk, the milk of Divine Wisdom. The milk of *Vedānta* she drilled into them while she rocked the cradle, while she sang her lullaby to them—

Sleep, baby, sleep.
No sobs, no cries, ne'er weep.
Rest undisturbed, all fears fling.
To praise Thee all the angels sing.
Arbiter of riches, beauty, and gifts
Thy innocent *Ātmā* governs and lifts.
Sleep, baby, sleep.

Soft roses, silvery dew-drops sweet,
Honey, fragrance, zephyrs genial heat
Melodious warbling, notes so dear.
And all that pleases eye or ear.
Comes from Thy heavenly, blissful home.
Pure, pure Thou art, untainted *Om*.
Sleep, baby, sleep.

No foes, no fear, no danger, none,
Can touch Thee, O Eternal One !
Sweet, lovely, tender, gentle, calm,
Of sleep Thy *Ātmā* doth embalm.
Thyself doth raise the spangled dome
Of starry heavens, O darling *Om* !
Sleep, baby, sleep.

The sun and moon Thy playing balls,
The rainbow arch bedecks Thy halls,
The milky ways for Thee to walk,
The clouds, when meet, of Thee they talk;
The spheres, Thy dolls, sing, dance and roam,
They praise Thee *Om*, *Om Tat Sat Om*!
Sleep, baby, sleep.

The beauteous objects, charming things,
Are flattering sounds of beating wings.
Of Thee, O Eagle blessed King,
Or fleeting shadows of Thy wing,
Bewitching beauty half reveals,
And as a veil it half conceals,
The wearer of this veil, Sweet *Om*,
The real Self, *Om, Tat Sat Om*.
Sleep, baby, sleep.

This gives some idea of the lullaby which the queen sang to seven of her sons. When the sons left home, they went abroad filled with Divinity. Through them was spiritualism spread. The eighth child was not trained exactly that way, because the father did not wish this child to leave the throne; he was not wanted to become a perfectly free man. So to this child the mother did not sing this lullaby, but she had to carry out her vow in some other way, that the child should not suffer sorrow or be pained in this life. As the eighth child was not to leave the royal throne it was not brought up the same way as the other seven. The eighth son was placed in the care of a nurse, but when the mother was about to die, this son was brought before her, and she gave him this lullaby which was written on paper and wrapped in some rich, costly material and covered with jewels. She encircled it around his arm, and asked him to keep the amulet most sacred. She asked him to read the paper contained within, she asked him to think it, feel it and it would

make him free, it would take away all sorrow. But she told him the amulet was not to be opened except in case of emergency. The mother died and the father died, and the boy became the king and ruled for many years.

One day elder brothers of the boy came to the capital of their father, and sent a message to the boy, Alark by name, and menaced him to leave the throne, because they were the elder brothers, and they were the rightful heirs to the throne. They said—"He ought to leave the throne in favour of the eldest brother." When this Alark was threatened by the authority of the elder brothers, when he was threatened by the precedence of his eldest brothers, he trembled with fear, he was terrified and knew not what to do; he wept at the fear of losing all his grandeur and glory. On returning to his bed at night he noticed this amulet around his arm, and the last words of his mother flashed through his mind. He opened it and read the paper, with tears in his eyes. He read—"Thou art pure, Thou art immutable, Thou art all knowledge, all power, Thou art the arbiter of all power, Thou art the giver and restorer of all beauty, all joy in the world. Think not yourself to be the body, depend not on worldly things, rise above it, meditate upon it, think it over, friend and enemy ye are!" The son realized it through and through, his anxiety and fear were gone, cheerfulness and joy were brought to him. He sang it again and again. What with the meaning and virtue of the song and what with the good wishes of the mother, he was revived from apparent death became himself; all fears and anxiety had fled, and sorrow was gone; he bade adieu to all worldly expectations, all worldly longing, all petty desires. He realized it so much, so filled was he with purity and power that it was gushing out of him; he forgot to go to bed. He dressed and went to the spot where his brothers were, and cried, "Come brothers and release me of this burden—this head-aching crown—here is the burden, take it, release me from it, I know I am all these bodies desirous

of sitting on the throne and ruling the kingdom; I am you, and you and I are one, there is no difference." When the brothers marked this sacredness on his face, it filled them with joy, and they said that they came not to take the throne, for they were the rulers of the whole world; they simply wanted to give him his true birth-right which he must not lose. They said—"O brother, this is not you who are the dupe of the senses; you brother, you are not the king of the earth only, but the king and ruler of the sun, the stars, the worlds, and all the *Lokas* that be. O brother, come, realize that you are the Infinite, the Immutable Self, the Sun of suns, the Light of lights." The prince realized this truth, and he (Alark) went on ruling, but he looked upon the office of the king as an actor's role in the theatre, imagining himself to be playing that part. Well, this prince was sane and nothing could make him sorrowful. He ruled as a mighty monarch and was a most successful king of the world. Success sought him.

Joy Eternal, Unbroken Peace is yours, nay, you are that. Realize your centre and be there for ever and ever.

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If the chaste woman, when her husband is dead in another country, takes the insignia of her husband, she would go to heaven after having lain (i.e., if she lies) on (the pile of funeral) fire.

A *Brāhmaṇa* woman who follows her dead husband, would not take herself and her husband to heaven, as a result of killing herself.

By the command of Brahmā, a *Brāhmaṇa* woman should not die (by going to the cremation ground) with (the dead body of) her husband. She, becomes a killer of herself, (by thus dying with her husband. So she should not die like this), but (should) become a recluse.

—*Padma Purāṇa, Sṛṣṭi Khaṇḍa* (52. 68b—70a)

Atrocities towards Womenfolk in Modern Times

—Dr. B. P. Verma 'Kamal'

There was a time in India when the womenfolk were given due honour in family-life and society. This fact can be well substantiated by various extracts from the Hindu scriptures.

Maharṣi Veda Vyāsa paid glorious tributes to the womenfolk, because it was she who conceived and gave birth to mankind. He said—

पितुरप्यधिका माता गर्भधारणकारणात्।
अतोहि त्रिषु लोकेषु नास्ति मातृसमो गुरुः॥

(*Bṛhaddharma Purāṇa*)

"There is no one more superior to mother in all the three *Lokas*, not even father, because it is she who conceives (and gives birth to mankind)."

The ancient social reformer and lawmaker Lord Manu had a great respect for the womenfolk. He, very clearly, told that peace can prevail in the family-life and ultimately in the society only if womenfolk are given due honour and reverence by their male counterparts. According to him—

यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः।

(*Manusmṛti*)

Maharṣi Yājñavalkya also speaks highly about the womenfolk, in the same vein—

भर्तृ भ्रातृ पितृ ज्ञाति श्वश्रू श्वसुर देवरैः।
बन्धुभिश्च स्त्रियः पूज्या ....॥

i. e., whether he is a husband, a brother, a father, near relatives, mother-in-law, a father-in-law or a brother-in-law, a woman is always respectable for all of them.

Mother Sītā while offering her prayers to *'Girijā Mātā'* pays glowing tributes by saying that men, sages and deities enjoy a happy life only by worshipping her (*Girijā Mātā's*) lotus feet.

देबि पूजि पद कमल तुम्हारे । सुर नर मुनि सब होहिं सुखारे ॥

(*Rāmacaritamānasa* I. 235.2)

In the following *Śloka*, we see that even the great gods like Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśa also show their high respects and regards for Mother Sarasvatī and bow down their heads before her.

या कुन्देन्दुतुषारहारधवला या शुभ्रवस्त्रावृता
या वीणावरदण्डमंडितकरा या श्वेतपद्मासना।
या ब्रह्माच्युतशंकरप्रभृतिभिर्देवैः सदा वंदिता
सा मां पातु सरस्वती भगवती निःशेषजाड्यापहा॥

The very fact that the names of Sītā, Rādhā and Gaurī always precede the names of their male counterparts—"Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, and Śaṅkara goes to prove that the womenfolk always enjoyed a reverential position in the Indian family.

Thus, it is evident that people had high regards for the womenfolk in the Indian Society in the past. The former very well realised that there could be no peace and prosperity in the family-life unless their female counterparts were given due honour. Consequently the womenfolk used to enjoy all the respect, love and affection from the mankind and as such peace and prosperity prevailed in ancient India, in all the fields of social life.

But, it is a matter of great concern for all of us today, that the angle of vision towards womenfolk has just changed and reversed. What to say of love and affection, honour and respect, the whole women-community is treated most shabbily and put to much disgrace and humiliation. They are not only abused and chastised but also physically assaulted and sometimes driven out of doors to seek their fortune elsewhere.

The wives, who once felt pride in surrendering before their husbands as their *Dāsīs* (maid servants) are not given the status of a maid servant even in the family. These womenfolk are

worse than cattle or even a slave and are either sometimes killed on flimsy grounds or forced to commit suicide. Today, these honourable house-wives are confined to the bars of the kitchen or compelled to lead a life of banishment in their own house. They are bereft of all facilities of a comfortable life, devoid of all love and affection and of due regards, which they so much deserve.

During recent years, atrocities on womenfolk have become too frequent and common. Such atrocities are of various nature ranging from abuse, humiliation, physical and mental torture, banishment, divorce, physical assault, rape, murder and more often compelling them to commit suicide out of frustration. Money hankering fathers-in-law and husbands come in fore-front to exercise such atrocities on newly wedded brides, who fail to bring a huge amount of desired cash or kind in lieu thereof towards dowry.

Marriage means age of merry-makings, but a large number of ill-fated newly married brides, who could have been seen enjoying life of merry-makings, are seen sad, morose and melancholy in tears. Numerous cases of this category have come to light when such ill-fated brides are either poisoned to death or are roasted alive. During the first quarter of this year (1995) there had been thirty cases of dowry-deaths in Delhi only, while the annual figure of such deaths was 129 in 1992, 127 in 1993 and 146 in 1994. The figures of the whole country can be well-imagined.

A second form of atrocities on womenfolk is seen when a female child is killed before she sees the light of the world. Science has developed so much, that it has become very easy to find out whether the child in the womb is a male one or a female. The so-called wise parents, prefer to kill the female child in the very womb; rather than to let her suffer atrocities in her in-law's house. This sort of killings help the parents to save money for other useful purposes than to waste the same towards useless dowry.

The media persons say that only in the Katihar district of Bihar State on an average 100 cases of female-infanticide are recorded per month. The second State in descending order involved in such malpractice is Tamilnadu. The ultimate result has been that whereas in 1901, there were 972 women against 1000 men, the number of women considerably decreased and came down to 929 only against 1000 men in 1991.

The most heinous crime against women, which is committed these days, is that of rape or gang-rape. Not a single day passes when we do not come across such sensational news in the daily Newspapers. It is not that only 'goonda' elements or irresponsible youths indulge in such acts, but we have records to show that responsible persons and guardians of society like—police officers, teachers, administrative officers, lawyers, legislators and ministers are also involved in such scandals.

Recently there was a great uproar in the Parliament when it was established that the policemen had misbehaved and gang-raped several women of Uttarākhaṇḍa at Muzaffarnagar. The India Government gave assurance in the *Loka Sabhā* on 19.5.1995 that an ordinance would be soon brought in the Parliament to enhance the period of punishment for those offenders, who indulge in such acts of cruelty towards womenfolk.

Atrocities on Indian women by their male counterparts have wide repercussion and the womenfolk have raised their heads in protest. They have gone to the guardians of the land to seek protection, formed different social organisations like—*"Mahilā Samākhyā, Mahilā Jāgṛti Saṁsthāna."* All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA) and various other forums to raise their voice against the cruel behaviour of their male counterparts. Thus a sense of revolt has developed among the women community and they are on confrontation with their male counterparts on various fronts. This has given a serious blow to the present-day family and social life and the whole structure of a happy family life has been shattered to pieces.

Recently a Hindu gentleman, without divorcing his first Hindu wife, married a Muslim woman and accepted Islam just only to have the religious right to marry more girls of his choice and enjoy a most extravagant sexy life. When the aggrieved Hindu wife went for legal protection, the Supreme Court took strong cognizance of the case and declared the second marriage with a Muslim woman illegal and null and void and advised the India Government to make suitable laws with regard to uniform civil code for all Indian citizens, irrespective of their religious faith, so that such atrocities on innocent wives may be checked and avoided.

Let us hope that good sense prevails among the male members of society and they realise their guilt and folly and stop forthwith all the atrocities towards womenfolk. Let people realise that a woman is not an object like consumer goods, as well as a means to quench their sexual thirst. She is more than that and much more above that. She is an embodiment of love, devotion and sacrifice. May Goddess Durgā bless the mankind with a clean heart and liberal mind towards womenfolk. There is still time to rectify their (men's) mistakes. It is never too late to mend.

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In India the mother is the centre of the family and our highest ideal. She is to us the representative of God, as God is the mother of the universe. It was a female sage who first found the unity of God, and laid down this doctrine in one of the first hymns of the *Vedas*. Our God is both personal and absolute, the absolute is male, the personal female. And thus it comes that we now say—"The first manifestation of God is the hand that rocks the cradle." He is of the 'arian' race, who is born through prayer, and he is a non-arian, who is born through sensuality.

—*Swami Vivekananda*

Brutal Atrocities on Women

(Something against the wholeness of life)

—*Shastri Chandrashekhar*

In praise of women the *Upaniṣad* said—"Whoever knows that spirit whose abode is desire, whose place is the heart, whose light is the mind, as the highest locality of every soul, in truth one who knows."

"I know indeed, O Yājñavalkya, that spirit, the highest locality of every soul, of whom thou speakest. He is the spirit, whose nature is desire."

"Say O Śākalya, which is the deity of the same." He said—'Women'.

It is said—"Where women are worshipped there Gods dwell." Taking into account the news that daily papers bring about the atrocities on women it is clear that not Gods but satans roam about with an evil eye. As soon as it was known that the sex of the foetus can be discovered medically then the 'woman-eaters' started hunting females in the womb. There are such devils that brutally rape minor girls and the worst thing is that gang-rape has become common. Victims of such inhuman activities are sometimes killed by the offenders for fear of being identified or they themselves commit suiside for fear of social displeasure. Newly wed brides are tortured for dowry. Many of them are burnt while others in disgust just kill themselves. The woman has been made a commodity of trade. They are sold or purchased and sometimes exported. They are forced to go into prostitution. A woman is looked upon with much indifference, nay with definite contempt. Even the protectors of law and order sometime drag a woman all naked through a crowd.

Was this the fate of women in the dawn of civilization? Perhaps not. In nature the male is inferior to the female. In the animal kingdom there is no rape or prostitution. In early human society women enjoyed the same degree of freedom that men had. The woman had the right to choose her life partner and was the centre of the family. In the flow of time new conditions demanded changes and man very shrewdly took advantage at such times. As the woman was tied to the family and as she by nature depended on man, the society dominated by men gradually curtailed her movement and liberty. Thus she was confined to the house at the mercy of her man. The freedom to live which the man enjoys, is denied to a woman and she who was *Śakti* in the beginning is reduced to *Abalā*, the powerless. Just to appease them we sometimes talk of doing something to improve their status. One of the useless topics about which we discuss much, is the right of women to study *Veda*. Having deprived them of their right to live, last year this topic of study of *Veda* by women, was much debated and discussed through newspapers. It seems as if the study of *Veda* will solve all problems with which women are struggling and suffering. The mind is indeed very cunning. To continue enjoying secretly all that in which it finds pleasure, it raises many such issues that are directly not related to the existing problem. While the matter in discussion distracts others from the main subject, the mind remains engaged in its selfish persuit.

It seems we have shifted far from the basic facts of life and the art of living together has lost much of its significance. We have gone far away from our object that scriptures formulated. In time man becoming selfish, made changes to keep women under his influence. And this he did in many ways. For example in *Veda* there is no reference of a woman becoming *Satī* after the death of her husband. The last line of one of the *Ṛks*—"ārohantu yonimagre." Some fifteen centuries ago a change came when the word 'Agne' was changed into 'Agre' and thus the burning of widows started. Today with all our education and achievement our attitude has not changed. We have gone a step further as

He is a beggar who gets the whole universe w/o woman

we are not burning widows but brides. How can such a society be in harmony and happiness? The newspaper with bold headlines proclaims that a woman is a victim of brutal atrocities every six minutes. All those changes that took place in time are responsible for the present state. Any discussion on this subject or minor changes here and there are not of much help. The million dollar question is—how we look at women. Because of our attitude towards life, not only women but the earth and the environment are also suffering considerably.

Krsnamūrti, the 20th century *Yogī* who went beyond all limitations of community and religion said—"Creation is the movement of the unknowable essence of the whole, it is never the expression of the past." As the society rigidly tries to modify the past to suit the present as such this change is only the continuation of the problem in a new situation. Therefore there is a strenuous struggle that women have to face in a society dominated by men. What is needed is a radical change within. The great *Ṛṣi* of the *Upaniṣad* said—"Behold O Maitreyī, by seeing, hearing, minding, knowing the Self all this universe is comprehended." Therefore it is necessary to know together what we are and what we want. Some one said—"He is a beggar who gets the whole universe but without a woman and if there is a good woman in a beggar's house then the man is the uncrowned king." A woman is provided with a sixth sense. She can fill the heart not only with the richness of life but also man's soul with divinity. Education has not solved the problem. What we need is a living touch and not a superficial relationship. It is not the question of time but the intensity of love. Even if it is for a moment, it will generate sufficient insight, courage and compassion to live together. *Upaniṣad* proclaimed—"Prajāpati (Lord of creation) bethought himself—'come, let me provide him a firm basis' so He created woman." Let us give our full co-operation and concern to this firm basis of our society to create life worth living. Let us discover the secret of wholeness of life.

Liberty to Women

—Lt. Col. R. K. Langar

It is encouraging to see women belonging to the towns and cities coming out of their homes and walking in the main stream of society. Young urban women are not only educating themselves well but are also taking up jobs in all spheres of life including police and defence services. Girls are also outshining the boys in educational and competitive examinations. This is one part of the progress made by women in our country. Yet there is another aspect of our women specially the rural women who are being subjected to all kinds of atrocities by the male dominated society. While urban women are making efforts to improve their status rural women, due to lack of education shall remain under strong influence of blind beliefs, rustic notions and superstitions. Liberty to women is one of our major tasks if we have to elevate the status of women in our society. Since rural women form a very big portion of women population, they have to be given due attention.

Women occupied a privileged position in Indian society during the Vedic period. They were considered symbol of Goddess on earth. It was believed that Gods are present where women are respected. Manu said that Gods are pleased where women are held in esteem. But with the passage of time women lost their glory and status and were subjected to all types of ill treatment. A popular belief emerged that sphere of women was home and women were suited for domestic work only. Women were confined at home and were not exposed to outside world. Women were supposed to put up with injustice and were

not expected to revolt. Not only that women were looked down upon as inferiors and were denied access to scriptures. What is most annoying is that even in the present times some of our so-called scholars and religious teachers feel that women's access to God cannot be direct and women should meditate on God through a male Brahmin priest. Due to all such notions women remained backward even though they were contributing due to historical, social and cultural reasons. Even now when our women are struggling to establish themselves instances of their ill treatment and sexual harassment are fairly common. A feeling exists in the society that women's opinion should not be given due weightage. Passing judgement on the character of women is considered easy. Most of our rural women are still considered to be child bearing machines and such women have no say in the size of the family. The economic dependence of women on men also makes women powerless and this powerless and emerging sexuality leave our women specially girls vulnerable to exploitation. Woman in Indian society is defined by her relationship with others. She is perceived as having no individuality. Physical difference between man and woman weighs heavily on the mind of average Indian woman and gives her a feeling of insecurity when confronted with men. Due to physical difference women are regarded as weaker sex. All this suggests that there is a definite requirement of liberty to women from the present attitude regarding women in our society.

First and foremost, women must understand that physical aspect is a small proportion of human personality. If direct comparison is drawn between man and woman on the physical side, men may have advantage of their physical strength at the same age group but at all other levels of human personality—mental, intellectual and spiritual—women are not lacking and are quite capable of outshining-men. In fact women are hardier than their male counterparts and under similar conditions survive better at all ages. Although both men and women are conscious

of their physical difference, women by themselves are not lacking in physical strength. Women have given ample proof of their strength by performing those deeds which once lied in the domain of men. Indian women have climbed Mount Everest and have shown the world that all achievements are within their grasp. India has produced a number of women scholars, scientists and saints which speaks high of womanly intellect and spiritual calibre. So our women must shed this misconception from their minds that they are weaker. To consider women weaker and insignificant is a gross misjudgement of their potentiality. In *Bhagavadgītā* Lord Kṛṣṇa while describing most prominent divine manifestation of our universe attributed His power for seven feminine qualities which are intelligence, memory, speech, prosperity, fame, firmness and forbearance. Swāmī Vivekānanda had said—"If I get 500 motivated men it shall take me 50 years to transform India whereas if I get 50 motivated women it may take only a few years." Our women should draw motivation from both these passages.

The other reason for the low profile of women in society is their very poor state of education. Two-third of illiterate population of world are women. Most of the girls who join the school drop out because of the pressure of their parents on the plea that their presence is more required at home. In India although women constitute nearly half the population but in the field of education almost two-third of our women population is uneducated whereas only one-third of male population is illiterate. The wide gap in education between women and men, gives an upper hand to men and a subordinated position to women. Due to comparatively poor education our women, specially rural women remain at a low state of development. We have to ensure that our women are not neglected in the field of education. Education is key for progress and without education one cannot become strong since mental and intellectual levels of human personality shall remain latent and unmanifested. The general impression that women are inferior

to men in thinking has to be negated by women only by developing themselves mentally, intellectually and even spiritually.

Women themselves are also to be blamed for their own ill-treatment. Women generally trouble women. In almost all cases of dowry disputes elderly women play the most prominent part in torturing young brides. Dowry deaths may be decreasing but the number of cases of harassment of young brides over dowry continue. Dowry deaths are not caused suddenly. There is often a long history of ragging and torture by the in-laws. For their upbringing women must look after the interest of fellow women. There is a need for greater understanding and mutual co-operation among women of all age groups. Women must realize that they have to raise their status in the society by their own efforts. Wrong done to women have to be righted by women only. No law can liberate women unless they liberate themselves. Women have to raise their voice against the atrocities committed on them and fight against them effectively. They have to establish that they are a force to be reckoned with. Women have to manifest their inner strength to face the world bravely rather than remaining objects of pity. In the society of the future there should be no division between men and women.

Position of women in our society has to be viewed on the basis of equal rights and opportunities which our constitution provides to women and men. Government has enacted a number of legislations like Hindu Code Bill, Hindu Succession Act, Anti Dowry Act, Equal Pay Requirement and right to divorce, for protection of women's rights and interests. Government is now also making renewed efforts to empower women by trying to awaken their hidden potentials. Reservation of jobs for women, nomination of seats for women in the *Pañcāyatī Rāja* and opening of banks exclusively for women are some examples of steps taken by the Government to raise the status of women. All such steps will be beneficial for women provided women are properly guided to join them. Certain women organisations

like All India Women Conference, National Council for Women are making efforts for creating awareness among women for self development. Women have good management capabilities. This is evident from the fact that the number of working women in India is greater than in the Western countries.

In their efforts to establish themselves young educated women have to play a key role. They have the enthusiasm and will to elevate themselves. They have to shed shyness and move forward and also take alongwith them, those who are hesitant. Young educated women have to bring about a revolution in the thinking of women by their own examples. If women can be source of inspiration for men there is no reason why women cannot be source of motivation for themselves.

Test of every civilization is the position held by women in the society. Enhancing social and economic status of women would go a long way in making women more aware of their rights. Women have to establish their identity of their own not by submission but by assertion and even by rebellion. Women will have to take collective action against oppression. Our people have to change their views on women. Men should also take responsibility to uplift women. In the decision-making, men should encourage women. Men should co-operate with women by displaying a sense of partnership in their matrimonial relations. Men and women have complementary roles and should work harmoniously. When every man and woman is equal before law then why should there be discrimination against women. There should be no discrimination against girls in food and education. We all must realize that next to God we are indebted to women for life. Women have to be liberated from the shackles of century-old customs. This valuable human body with which we can attain God is given and nourished by woman in the form of mother. We in no way can repay her debt. Therefore it is paramount duty to respect woman and see that they are not harassed and victimised and we should offer all opportunities for her physical, moral and spiritual development.

Women and Affectionate Relations

—Dileep Bhatia

Affectionate relations are very rare these days. Life is full of struggles, tensions, worries and problems. We require energy to fight with odd situations in tense environment. Shortage of time is a common argument. Love and affection is important, but it is missing. We have materialistic achievements, but, we are finding very difficult to find an affectionate person with whom we can share our problems.

Women are prime source of affection. Women are affectionate by nature. They are having soft heart. Women are wonderful source of energy. Women have different roles, such as mother, sister, wife, daughter, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, mother-in-law etc. There is no substitute of mother. She is the first teacher for a child. God can not remain available everywhere, so God created mothers. The role and contribution of mother can never be exactly and rightly evaluated. Mother is supreme. Mother is full of love and a treasure of affections. Mother means affection. We all have been developed as our mothers wanted to.

Women can play and are playing key and important role of distributing affection. No words can express these feelings. Whether she is a sister or *Bhābhī*, we get lot of stamina, energy and power from her. Sons are sons till their wife comes but daughters are daughters till their life, is a fact commonly known to each one of us. *Rakṣā Bandhana* and *Bhaiyā Dūja* are two most affectionate and lovely days of every year for us. A brother is lucky to have an affectionate sister. Wife is the best friend and life partner. There is a woman behind every successful man,

we all admit and accept this. An affectionate wife is an asset. An affectionate woman can turn the atmosphere of a home into heaven.

The affectionate environment should not be polluted. It needs continuous care, devotion and dedication. Women are duty-conscious. She contributes to the maximum as it is possible even in most odd conditions. Affection is such a treasure, which never decreases. The more she gives, continues to give, but still she is full of affection. We get relief when we talk to an affectionate woman. We forget our grief. She can change our life-style.

We have technological developments and scientific progress in all spheres of our life. We have money, bank-balance, shares, land, property, jewelries etc., but, we are finding very hard to get pure love and unselfish affection. A good woman can bridge this gap. She gives us shelter and protection. A small child feels maximum safe in hands of mother. Women must continue to shower and spread the affection to everyone. This can definitely decrease our sufferings. Life is very valuable. To enable us to continue good work in this world, we need love and affection at continuous and regular interval. Let us maintain good relations with everybody. We all are passengers on the platform of this world. This world is not permanent home. Each one of us will definitely have to move out on some or the other day. There is no escape. Life span is fixed. No one can extend or shorten the fixed life span given by almighty God or nature, whatever name we call by. We must make fruitful use of the available time left with us. Women are joining with us in different roles at different times. Women show us path and direction. A positive and supportive attitude is a must to get good and desired results.

Affection is a continuous requirement in every age. A small child needs care and an old aged person needs protection. There is no substitute for blessings of mother, sister, and *Bhābhī*. Elder sister and elder *Bhābhī* are considered equivalent to mother in

· Life span is fixed in proportion?
· Women and affection go together.

our society. Mother, sister and *Bhābhī* generally give. They never take. They give love, affection, support, guidance and right direction to us. Affection is our primary and fundamental need. Affection is tonic for us. In our society, we are still lucky to some extent that affection still exists. Its percentage level has decreased, but, we can do our best to increase this level.

Women and affection go together. Life is a challenge as well as a compromise. Each one of us should do his best to get full utilization of love of affectionate women in our society and family. Life is a challenge as well as compromise

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पितृमातृपतिभ्रातृदत्तमध्यग्न्युपागतम् ।
आधिवेदनिकाद्यं च स्त्रीधनं परिकीर्तितम् ॥

"The cash or kinds received by the bride on the occasion of the marriage, from her father, mother, brother or the bridegroom and in case the husband marries another girl during the life-time of his first wife and gives any cash or property to satisfy his first wife, is all known as *Strīdhana* over which nobody else has got any claim till she is alive."

—*Yājñavalkya Smṛti* (II. 143)

मृते भर्तरि पुत्रस्तु वाच्यो मातुररक्षिता ॥
सूक्ष्मेभ्योऽपि प्रसङ्गेभ्यः स्त्रियो रक्ष्या विशेषतः ।
द्वयोर्हि कुल्योः शोकमावहेयुररक्षिताः ॥

"A son who fails to protect his widow mother deserves to be condemned. The woman should be guarded against all such occasions which have even the slightest potentiality of weakening the character because unguarded women become the cause of grief to both their families."

—*Manu Smṛti* (IX.4-5)

Bhāratīya Women and Fine Arts

—*N. Rajagopalan*

Indian arts have flourished in the benign light of divine inspiration all along. Arts were mostly dedicated to God, the unique feature of Indian culture from Vedic times. Thus there has all along been a spiritual flavour in the practice and propagation of arts. Man sees God in his own image and artistes have not been lagging behind in tapping this belief. Sculptors, *Vāggeyakāras,* musicians, dancers, dramatists and other artists brought to focus a galaxy of gods and goddesses to suit individual attitudes and cultures. And all that, to guide with solicitude the *Jīvātmā* towards the *Paramātmā* consciously, but more often unconsciously. Art was but a handmaid to further spiritual objectives and endeavours. It is this sweet wedding of spiritualism and arts that helped arts to attain pristine heights even in epic and Puranic periods. Just as there is no twilight in the east, there has been no painful progress in arts too; and the earliest is itself of the finest. One is delighted to see *Vedas* and epics presenting a glorious portrayal of sophisticated arts, particularly among women! Arts are summoned often as they are evocative, creative self-expression aiding realization of beauty, *Śāntam* and *Saukhyam.*

The *Nāṭya Śāstra* of sage Bharata (200 B. C.—200 A. D.) goes into such minute details of dance, drama and music that it connotes splendiferous practice of the gracious arts by women e.g. 'singing bereft of *Alaṅkāras* will be as colourless as night without the moon, river without water, creeper without flowers and lady without ornaments'—

शशिना रहितेव निशा विजलेव नदी लता विपुष्पेव।
अविभूषितेव कान्ता गीतिरलंकारहीना स्यात्॥

(XXIX. 75)

Icons that are chiselled out, pictures that are painted by master artistes like Rajah Ravi Vermā, frescoes of exquisite beauty and the immense output of literature have drawn their ultimate inspiration and models in some way or other from artistic or saintly *Gṛhalakṣmīs*, the pride of Bharata. No wonder it is (perhaps, was) said that the culture and religion of India survive in its kitchens. Women have always enjoyed and played a conspicuous but subtle role in moulding culture and inspiring arts and artists. Such inspiration and contribution came unostentatiously and voluntarily in a way that is unique to Indian womanhood. The inherent and intimate nexus between Indian women and art finds copious references in ancient treatises. Vātsyāyana advises women to study and learn the arts to enhance their cultured living and personal beauty. Queen Indumatī is friend, philosopher, guide and perfect collaborator to *Aja* in the pursuit of the fine and the beautiful (Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṁśa*). Celestial homes reflect the same. Sarasvatī plays on *Vīṇā* and is Goddess of learning; Pārvatī devised Lāsya, danced and taught; Mātaṅgī is Goddess of music. *Rāgas* are named after goddesses. Rambhā, Urvaśī and Menakā are household names for arts. Women are the repository of fragrant *Bhāva*, ebullient *Rasa* and *Racanā*—all vital for a cultured home and refined manners. From the first lullaby to the last threnody, music of woman pervades the home. ''कौसल्या सुप्रजा राम'' of Vālmīki or *'Mannu Pugal Kausalai tan, mani vayiru vaittavane*....of Kulaśekhara Ālwār carries the smiling child from the humble cradle and cottage to the palace at Ayodhya and impregnates the child with the first lessons or impressions of the glory of its heritage. The chisel was in the hands of man but the chiselled sculpt is mostly feminine as temples, big and small, bear witness to. The intrinsic worth of women in

the field of arts finds specific recognition at the hands of the foremost and ancient authority, Bharata *Muni* when he stipulates—

"Singing and dancing must be given to women because their voice is naturally melodious and sweet and their gestures and movements naturally graceful. The roles of not only women but of gods and men of delicate body (in dramas) must be played by women."

(*Nāṭya Śāstra*, Ch. XXXV. 33—46)

If classic *Abhinaya* or classical music pervade the homes of the elite and the professional classes, folk dances and folk music govern the homes of the less privileged, plain folks. The artistic lifeline runs through the body fabric of the nation, particularly its women. If classical music and dance focus on celestials and kings, folk arts indent on village deities, lives of chieftains and common folk. Thus it is difference of degree in sophisticated approach and refinement but the inspiration and approach are the same. While the contribution of women to architecture, sculpture, literature and painting is minimal, women's participation in music, dance, drama and other arts has been remarkably substantial. Where *Bhāva* and *Rasa* dominate, the woman is positively there. Where she is not the artist herself, she provides the divine inspiration and sentiment, theme, emotion and energy.

Here is an incident of relevance. Vālmīki is attracted by the sight of a pair of *Krauñca* birds making innocent love. Lo! just then, a hunter shoots down by arrow the male and the female *Krauñca* cries pathetically. The Ādikavi's warm heart is sad and unconsciously flows out of his classical mouth a verse of exquisite beauty—

मा निषाद प्रतिष्ठां त्वमगमः शाश्वतीः समाः।
यत् क्रौञ्चमिथुनादेकमवधीः काममोहितम्॥

Vālmīki is delighted at the poetic fragrance of the verse and Brahmā assures him that it is the gift of Śrī Vāgdevī and instructs him to compose the Rāmāyaṇa. (Of course, there is

a version that it was the female *Krauñca* that was killed). Dr. S. Śaṅkaranārāyaṇan suggests that Vālmīki should have taken the role of a hunter to offer, according to Vedic traditions, the male *Krauñca* to win the grace of Śrī Vāgdevī. He adds—

"The killing of the *Krauñca* kindled the sentiments of pity in the sage........It was the pitiable agonising cry of the female bird that strengthened the sentiment in the sage and made it the immediate cause for his composition. The cry of the female was a must."

—*The Circumstances of the Birth of Rāmāyaṇa*

The vital role of the female for rousing noble emotions is indicated here. *Śṛṅgāra* exuding rapturous *Nāyaka*, *Nāyikā* and *Sakhī Bhāvas* has enriched the soul and appeal of music and dance. Art that flourishes on ethereal *Bhāvas* does depend on women and they have fulfilled this task admirably. That is the primary contribution of women to art and culture. Plato believed that good education consists in knowing how to sing and dance well. The finest of fine arts, music and dance, are the defacto estate and preserve of women. Śrī *Rāmacaritamānasa*, for instance, mentions—

"Celestial damsels were singing melodious strains."

"Rambhā and other heavenly damsels, past masters in amorous sports, sang in undulating tones......sported in many ways ball in hand."

"There was tumultuous clash of musical instruments. Fair-faced, bright-eyed damsels sang melodious songs in chorus."

—All from *Bālakāṇḍa*

"The best musicians skilled to play;
The dancing girls in raiment gay."

—*Vālmīki*

Mīrā and Śrī Āṇḍāla are household names for *Bhajanas*. Can there be a more graceful dancer in arts than Padmāvatī lauded by her own spouse?

In the literary field scores have made prominent appearance.

Ketaladevī, queen of Cālukya Vikramāditya VI (1076—1126) came to be hailed as Abhinava Sarasvatī for literary attainments. Avvaiyar of Tamil Nadu, Vijayaṅka of Karnataka, Thimmakka of Annamācārya family of Telugus and many others were poetesses of immense stature. Maṇḍana's wife Ubhayabhāratī (*Sarasa* or *Sarasvatī*) umpired the religious debate between her husband and Ādi Śaṅkara. There have been such other women of eminence. Still the fact remains that there has been a paucity of woman *Vaggeyakāras*. Śrī Harṣa's Sāgarikā in *Ratnāvalī* is shown as drawing beautiful portrait of king Udayana. Garland making, *Raṅgolī/Kolam*, embroidery, sewing, darning, cooking, decoration of home, preparation of cosmetics, dolls and hosts of many others are the preserve of women exuding skill, creativity, perfection and beauty and reflecting rhythm of mind and hearts, hands and tools. The innate ability and aptitude of women are in no way inferior to those of men. In fact, they excel men in fine arts.

Poverty and absence of schools in ages past had deprived the poorer sections of scope to develop arts to high levels. Their artistic instincts had to remain dormant with nominal expression except in respect of professional sections (*Devadāsīs*, pipers, dramatists, etc....). Village arts, however, continued unhindered. The invasions in the 11—16th centuries, the attendant disturbance to homes and hearths and more particularly the acute sense of insecurity among women did sap their innate urges for artistic expression. Talents and artistic instincts of women could not effloresce till long after the struggle for political independence gathered momentum. If women were able to sustain micro versions of arts so long, it is a tribute to the sagacity, vitality and depth of their artistic background and the spriritual base of the finer arts. The grandeur of their exception, fragrance of artistic expression and unflagging zeal helped women to retain their grasp of finer arts, etc., occupational arts have, however, suffered in the last decade or two owing to the aggressive advent

of modernism and influences of the West. Classical arts too suffer in the prevailing atmosphere of *avant garde*. *Bhāratīya* women have remarkable spirit of resurgence and reorientation. The ruddy edge of the morning sun assures that women are sure to take arts to greater heights of glory given the fillip. The reorientation has to start with girls at their impressionable age whether at schools or elsewhere.

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According to the directions of the scriptures which were put in practice by Rāma in his family relations, the wife had to wake up every morning and while Rāma was absorbed in meditation, while Rāma was feeling and realizing the divinity, when he was lost in God, when he was beyond the body or the mind when that nectar of sweet immortality was being taken—then would the wife come, just as the Roman Catholics worship their images, so would she come and look at Rāma, ignoring the body. Here as Rāma had ignored the body, had risen above this materiality, had become one with divinity so the wife would see only the divinity, God, nothing else. Thus sitting at a distance from Rāma's body she would fix her eyes upon Rāma's forehead; she being not so highly advanced, would think of this body, and thus while chanting *Om*, she would keep this body before her mind to such a degree that all other thoughts were shut out; the idea of her own body was entirely lost. She felt herself as transformed or merged in the body of Rāma, but what about the spirit ? There she felt and realized that her own self was the Self of Rāma. She felt and realized that it was not Rāma meditating, lost in God-consciousness, but that it was she lost in God-consciousness. Rāma's meditation was hers, and she was feeling herself as one with the whole universe; there she felt and realized that she was the Self and spirit of the whole world. This way she was a help to Rāma, as it were, and Rāma was a help to her.

—*Swami Rama Tirtha*

Bride Burning

—Dr. R. D. Srivastava

They burn the brides,
Over pyre of greed,
Then bow before gods,
And pamper the priest.

A bud that blossomed and smiled,
In a courtyard, on a parental branch,
She has parted with a saddened heart,
To an alien home, with an alien man,
With hopes and fears pinned in her heart.

The articles of wealth with her bridal train
Could not appease her in-laws,
And their rancour she has to face.

No love, no hug, no soothing glance
Could she receive from wretched groom,
Scolded, humiliated and beaten as beasts,
She spends her agonizing nights and days;
Yet the brutes neither stop nor repent,
But ask greater ransoms for her sake.

In depravity men surpass the beasts,
Yet proclaim themselves next to God;
Ah! the 'Satan' in them has taken upper hand,
And here she lies as blistering corpse.

Om Tat Sat

Woman on Indian Coins

—*Dr. Smt. Shyamla Gupta*

The woman is having a very important position since ancient time. In the beginning only *Mātṛkanye* were worshipped. Women have never lacked men, in social, religious and economical field and even sometime she has proved her superiority over men. Woman is the most wonderful creation of God. The name of Goddess is taken first then the name of God as—Sīta-Rāma, Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, Gourī-Śaṅkara etc.

In this article I am giving those coins on which woman or her name is placed on the coins. These women are not the imaginary character but they are having their name in golden letters in Indian History.

(1) Kashmir Diddārānī (960—972 A.D.)—

Magadha kingdom of Aśoka was extended up to Kashmir. Kuṣāṇa, Kidar and Hūṇa ruled over Kashmir. Coins of Kashmir began from Torman coins. Karkota dynasty ruled over Kashmir in 800 A.D. In 9th century. Utpala kings of Karkota issued their coins. In this period queen Sugundha alone and queen Diddā with her husband's name issued the coins.

Metal-copper, weight 5.5 gms., shape—round, size 8 cms.

Obverse—Goddess seated, Dl on left and Kṣema' on right (Dl—Diddā, Kṣema—Kṣema Gupta).

Reverse—Standing king, GU on right.

Queen Diddā issued her coin individually. On Obv—DIDDĀ and on Rev. Devya.

(2) Raziā Sultāna (1236—1240 A.D.)—

Sultāna Iltutamish had nominated his daughter Raziā or

Raziatuddina as his successor. She took an active part in wars. Raziā ruled from 1236—40 A.D. She issued the coin in silver and copper on her name. Metal silver, weight 9.86 gms,size 2.5cms, shape—round. On these coins some complementary words about the ruler, in Arabic can be easily read.

(3) Nūrejahān (1033—1037 A.H.)—

Mughal Emperor Jahāngīra ruled over India from 1014—1037 A.H. In the later days of his reign, Jahāngīra's physical and mental power had begun to fail, so he left the administration to his queen Nūrejahān. Now Nūrejahān was virtually the ruler of empire. Coins of Nūrejahān were issued from Agra, Ahmedabad, Akbarnagar, Allahabad, Kashmir, Lahore, Patna and Surat in gold and silver. The coins now bear a couplet Ba Hukum Jahāngīra Yaft Shud Zewar Ba Nāma Nūrejahān Pādasāha Begum (by order of Śāha Jahāngīra gold attained a hundred beauties when the name of Nūrejahān Bādaśāha Begum was placed on it).

Metal—Silver, weight 11.6 gms, size 1.5 cms, shape—round.
Obverse—Zihukum Śāha Jahāngīra Yaft Sad Zi war Zarb-Surat.
Reverse—Banāma Nūrejahān Bādaśāha Begum 1036.

(4) Śāhajahān Begum Bhopal (1868—1900 A.D.)—

She ruled over Bhopal state of M.P. Kudsiā Begum, Sikandara Begum and Śāhajahān Begum issued coins from Bhopal in silver and copper.

Metal—Copper, weight 30.7 gms, size 2.5cms, shape—round.
Obverse—Śāhajahān Begum 1289.
Reverse—Zarb Bhopal.

(5) Victoria Queen (1837—1901 A.D.)—

On the death of her uncle Willium IV queen Victoria came to the throne. Coin struck during her long reign fall under two broad group.

(1) Those issued during (1840—61 A.D.) under the auspices of East India Company.

(2) Those issued in the period (1862—1901 A.D.) after the Government and administration of the country were transferred

from the company to the crown.

She issued coins in gold, silver and copper metal.

Metal—Silver, size 3.3 cms, shape—round.

Obverse—Head of the Queen Victoria, English legend Victoria Queen.

Reverse—East India Company around the coin and 1840 written below. One rupee written in English and persian.

(6) Metal—Silver, weight 11.6 gms, size 3.0 cms, shape—round.

Obverse—Crowned and bust of queen Victoria, around Victoria Empress.

Reverse—Within floral wreath one rupee India 1862.

(7) Indirā Gāndhī (1917—1984 A.D.)—

After her death Govt. of India issued coins in the memory of Indirā Gāndhī. Govt. of India issued Rs.100, Rs.20, Rs.10, Rs.5 and half rupee coin in silver and cupronical.

Metal—Nickel, weight 5.0 gms, size 2.4 cms, shape—round.

Obverse—Head of Indirā Gāndhī, Indirā Gāndhī written in English and Hindi. 1917—1984 written below.

Reverse—Aśoka capital around Paise Bharata India 50.

(8) Equality Development Peace (1975)—

A set of three development oriented coin (D.O.C) commemorative coins were issued to celebrate the International Women's Year in 1975, with the motto Equality Development peace.

Metal—Silver, weight 35 gms, size 4.4 cms, shape—round.

Obverse—A woman profile in the left fore ground, a dam with water line in the right back ground and an ear of corn rising infront of water line. Around the Periphery Equality Development Peace written in Hindi and English with the year of issue 1975.

Reverse—Lion capital design with the denomination noted under neath.

Specimen of Indian Coins issued by or in the name



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विप्रदुष्टां स्त्रियं चैव पुरुषघ्नीमगर्भिणीम्।
सेतुभेदकरीं चाप्सु शिलां बध्वा प्रवेशयेत्॥

"A wicked woman (one who resorts to abortion etc.), one who has killed her husband and one who blasts a bridge, should be drowned in deep water attaching a heavy weight by the neck if she is not carrying".

—*Yājñavalkya Smṛti* (II.278)

– Satihood means to become one with God
Sati – woman who attains perfection by worship of her husband.
Sat (saint) – man attains perfection by worship of God

Satī: The Vindication of the Hindu Woman

—Keshavram N. Iengar

"As a chaste woman wholly devoted to her husband is united with him forever even after death, so the man who is solely devoted to his own chosen deity certainly obtains union with God."

—Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa

"Life of my life, death's bitter sword
Hath severed us like a broken word:
Rent us in twain who are but one,
Shall the flesh survive when the soul is gone?"

—Sarojini Naidu

"A man who attains *Siddhi* (perfection) through worship of God, is called a *Sat* (saint) and a woman who attains perfection through worship of her husband is known as *Satī*, the two words being identical except for the difference in gender. Both the words indicate identity with God, who is the only reality (*Sat*). A woman who has attained the state of Satihood must be taken to have become one with God. Through devotion to and worship of her husband, a woman can attain all that is possible to attain through worship of God."

—Santanu Behari Dwivedi, The Kalyana-Kalpataru, Jan. 1939. P. 296

Satī the state of being true, represents the attainment of oneness of a Hindu woman with her Lord and husband, which in its highest manifestation is in her merging with him on his funeral pyre. This *Yajña* of *Satī* is as old as the Hindu *Purāṇas*, and cases have taken place in India right upto the twentieth century. Its equivalents for men are—death in a righteous war

(*Dharmayuddha*), the taking of *Saṁnyāsa*, the attainment of *Sāyujya* and finally of *Jīvanmukti*. The question of compulsion of the candidates does not arise in any of the cases.

What then is the reason for the modern revulsion and condemnation of the instances of *Satī*? The plain answer in addition to ignorance, is jealousy. How could a mere (Indian) woman rise to the stage of such heroism, not even imaginable by us (Anglican) mortals? Oh no, we must not let her. So let us bring a legislation against *Satī* and condemn all cases as one of compulsion and wilful murder from base motives of her relatives. And so did eye-witnesses emerge one month after the *Satīyajña* at Deorala (Sept. 1987) to swear that Rūpa Kanwara was forcibly dragged to ascend the funeral pyre of her husband. Are the thousands of devotees in Rajasthan and elsewhere who have erected temples to *Satīmātā* all superstitious fools?

Let us admit that under the mills of 'Modern Education' Hindus have been educated (led forth) out of our manifold sacred traditions, to see nothing but primitive and superstitious beliefs behind our sacred ideals. *Saṁnyāsa* and *Satīprathā*, both equally rare, are only two among our discounted traditions. Modern India has a long way to go to regain her roots dislocated by centuries of anti-Hindu propaganda, first by the Muslim conquerors, then by the Europeans with their 'Missionaries and currently by our own Marxists and 'Secularists'.

Let us see what a Savant of Modern India wrote on the subject of *Satī* in 1912.

In the *Mahābhārata* there is reported a conversation between Śiva and Umā. The great God asks her to describe the duties of women, addressing her, in so doing, in terms which acknowledge her perfect attainment of the highest wisdom possible to man or god.

She answers—"The duties of woman are created in the rites of wedding, when in presence of the nuptial fire she becomes the associate of her Lord, for the performance of all righteous

deeds. She should be beautiful and gentle, considering her husband as her god and serving him as such in fortune and misfortune, health and sickness, obedient even if commanded to unrighteous deeds or acts that may lead to her own destruction. She should rise early, serving the gods, always keeping her house clean, tending to the domestic sacred fire, eating only after the needs of gods and guests and servants have been satisfied, devoted to her father and mother and the father and mother of her husband. Devotion to her Lord is woman's honour, it is her eternal heaven; and O Maheśvara, I desire not paradise itself if thou art not satisfied with me!"

"She is a true wife who gladdens her husband," says Rājaśekhara in the *Karpūra Mañjarī*. From the Laws of Manu—"........If a wife obeys her husband, she will for that reason alone be exalted in heaven."......"She who controlling her thoughts, speech and acts, violates not her duty to her Lord, dwells with him after death in heaven, and in this world is called by the virtuous a faithful wife."

Even in recent times, in families where the men have received English education unrelated to Indian life and thought, the inheritance of Indian modes of thought and feeling rests in the main with women; for a definite philosophy of life is bound up with household ritual and traditional etiquette and finds expression equally in folk-tale and cradle-song and popular poetry, and in those *Paurāṇika* and epic stories which constitute the household literature of India. Under these conditions......Indian women, with all their faults of sentimentality and ignorance, have remained the guardians of a spiritual culture which is of greater worth than the efficiency and information of the educated...... Woman is nearer to the world than man, of which the evidence appears in her always more personal point of view............

A majority of women have always, and naturally, preferred marriage and motherhood..........But those who felt the call of religion,.... and those trained from childhood as expert artists,

have always maintained a great tradition in various branches of cultural activity, such as social service or music. Hindu sociologists have always regarded these specializations as more or less incompatible with wifehood and motherhood, life is not long enough for the achievement of many different things.

Hinduism justifies no cult of ego-expression, but aims consistently at spiritual freedom.....The ultimate purposes of Hindu social discipline are that men should unify their individuality with a life wider and deeper than individual life.....and escape the all-too-narrow prison of the 'I' and 'mine.' Anonymity is thus in accordance with the truth.

In the words of Manu—"To be mothers were women created and to be fathers men,......therefore are religious sacraments ordained in the *Vedas* to be observed by the husband together with the wife."

The Asiatic theory of marriage, which would have been perfectly comprehensible in the middle ages, before the European woman had become an economic parasite.......is not readily intelligible to the industrial democratic consciousness of Europe and America, which is so much more concerned for rights than for duties, and desires more than anything else to be released from responsibilities......Western reformers would awaken a divine discontent in the hearts of Oriental women, forgetting that the way of ego-assertion cannot be a royal road to realisation of the Self. The industrial mind is primarily sentimental, and therefore cannot reason clearly upon love and marriage; but the Asiatic analysis is philosophic, religious and practical.

Let us not deceive ourselves that because the Western marriage is nominally founded upon free choice, it therefore secures a permanent unity of spiritual and physical passion.

What are we going to regard as the constructive basis of the normal marriage? For Hindu sociologists marriage is a social and ethical relationship, and the begetting of children the payment of a debt. Romantic love is a brief experience of

timeless freedom.....In almost every case there must follow a return to the world of unreality......The lovers are fortunate if there remains to them a basis of common interest and common duty and a mutuality of temperament adequate for friendship, affection and forbearance. In the Hindu marriage—happiness will arise from the fulfilment of vocation..........The oriental marriage, like the oriental actor's art, is the fulfilment of a traditional design, and does not depend upon the accidents of sensibility. To be such a man as Rāma, such a wife as Sītā, rather than to express 'oneself', is the aim. The formula is predetermined; husband and wife alike have parts to play.........A wife should look on her husband as a god, regardless of his personal merits or demerits—it would be beneath her dignity to deviate from a woman's norm merely because of the failure of a man. It is for her own sake and for the sake of the community....that life must be attuned to the eternal unity of *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*.

Hindu society was established on a basis of group morality. No absolute ethic is held binding on all classes alike; but within a given class the freedom of the individual is subordinated to the interest of the group, the concept of duty is paramount.......Rāma, who stands in epic history as the mirror of social ethics, consents to banish his wife, because the people murmur against her.......The social order is placed before the happiness of the individual, whether man or woman. This is the explanation of the greater peace which distinguishes the arranged marriage of the east from the self-chosen marriage of the West: where there is no deception there can be no disappointment.....

Let us return to the Indian *Satī* and try to understand her better.The root meaning of the word is 'essential being'......in the wide sense. But she who refuses to live when her husband is dead is called *Satī* in a more special sense. This last proof of the perfect unity of body and soul, this devotion beyond the grave, has been chosen by many Western critics as our

reproach; we differ from them in thinking of our 'Suttees' not with pity, but with understanding, respect, and love. So far from being ashamed of our 'Suttees' we take a pride in them.

It has come to be believed that *Satī* must have been a man-made institution imposed on women by men for reasons of their own, that it is associated with faminine servility, and that it is peculiar to India. These views are historically unsound. It is true that in aristocratic circles *Satī* became to some degree a social convention...... But now that nearly a century has passed since it was prohibited by law (in 1829), it should not be difficult to review the history and significance of *Satī* more dispassionately than was possible in the hour of controversy and the atmosphere of religious prejudice.

The idea of *Satī* occupies a considerable place in Indian literature. *Satī* herself, who could not tolerate the insults levelled against her husband by her father, is the prototype of all others. In the early Tamil lyrics we read of an earthly bride whom the *Brāhmaṇas* seek to dissuade from the sacrifice; but she answers that since her lord is dead, the cool waters of the lotus pool and the flames of the funeral pyre are alike to her...... Later in history we read of the widowed mother of Harṣa that she replied to her son's remonstrances—"I am the lady of a great house; have you forgotten that I am the lioness—mate of a great spirit, who, like a lion, had his delight in a hundred battles?"

A man of such towering genius and spirituality as Kabīra so takes for granted the authenticity of the impulse to *Satī* that he constantly uses it as an image of surrender of the ego to God. In all Indian mystical literature the love-relation of woman to man is taken unhesitatingly as an immediate reflection of spiritual experience.

Let us notice more particularly the beautiful and very interesting poem of Muhammada Rizā Nau in the reign of Akabara upon the 'Suttee' of a Hindu girl whose betrothed was killed on the very day of the marriage. This *Musalmāna* poet

is simply amazed 'that after the death of men, the woman shows forth her marvellous passion.' He does not wonder at the wickedness of men, but at the generosity of women; how different from the modern critic who can see no motive but self-interest behind a social phenomenon that passes his comprehension.

This Hindu bride refused to be comforted and wished to be burnt on the pyre of her dead betrothed. When Akabara was informed of this, he called the girl before him and offered wealth and protection, but she rejected all his persuasion as well as the counsel of the *Brāhmaṇas*, and would neither speak nor hear of anything but the fire.

Akabara was forced, though reluctantly, to give his consent to the sacrifice.......Even from amidst the flames she replied to prince Dāniyāla's remonstrances, "Do not annoy, do not annoy, do not annoy." 'Ah,' exclaims the poet:

"Let those whose hearts are ablaze with the Fire of
Love learn courage from this pure may!
'Teach me, O God, the way of Love, and enflame my
Heart with this maiden's Fire."

Accounts of more modern 'Suttees' are given by "Englishmen who have witnessed them. One which took place in Baroda in 1825 is described by R. Hartley Kennedy, the widow persisting in her intention in spite of 'Several fruitless endeavours to dissuade her." A more remarkable case is described by Sir Frederick Halliday. Here also a widow resisted all dissuasion and finally proved her determination by asking for a lamp, and holding her finger in the flame until it was burnt and twisted like a quill pen held in the flame of a candle; all this time she gave no sign of fear or pain whatever. Sir F. Halliday had therefore to grant her wish even, as Akabara had had to do three centuries earlier.

Western critics have often asserted that the oriental woman is a slave and that we have made her what she is. We do not identify freedom with self-assertion; the oriental woman is what

she is, only because our social and religious culture has permitted her to be and to remain essentially feminine. Exquisite as she may be in literature and art, we dare not claim for ourselves as men the whole honour of creating such a type.

The Eastern woman is not,.....superior to other women in her innermost nature; she is perhaps an older, purer and more specialised type, but certainly a universal type....Nobility in women does not depend upon race, but upon ideals; it is the outcome of a certain view of life.

Sāvitrī, Padmāvatī, Sītā, Rādhā, Umā, Līlāvatī, Tārā our divine and human heroines—have a universal fellowship, for everything feminine is of the Mother......When the Titanic sank, there were many women who refused.....to be rescued without their husbands, or were only torn from them by force......Love-heroism is always and everywhere the same, and not only in India, nor only in ages past, may be stronger than death.

The cry of our Indian *Satī*, "Do not annoy, do not annoy," is no cry for protection from a fate she does not seek; it is individualistic and has been uttered by every woman in the world who has followed love beyond the grave.

It is part of woman's innermost nature to worship man; her husband is for her a place of pilgrimage....man; and he is her spiritual teacher.....What we have not yet learnt is that like relations are needed for the finest quality of life. The tenderness of women is as necessary to man now, as ever it was when his first duty was that of physical warfare....Woman possesses the power of perpetually creating in man the qualities she desires and this for her is an infinitely greater power than the possession of those special qualities could ever confer upon her directly.

It is not for Asia alone that the oriental woman preserves a great tradition. If she too should be persuaded to expend her power upon externals, there might come a time on earth when it could not be believed that such women had ever lived, as the ancient poets describe. Sāvitrī, Padmāvatī, Anasūyā, Sītā,

Rādhā, Padminī, would then be empty names......Already it has been felt in Western schools that we "are not furnished with adequate womanly ideals in history and literature."

It is the sacred duty of parents to arrange a marriage for every daughter. There is no divergence of what is spiritual and what is sensuous. It has never happened in India that women have been judged by or have accepted purely male standards. Though it may be able to teach us much of the means of life, the Western world has everything yet to relearn about life itself."

—*Ananda K. Coomaraswamy*

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दुर्व्याहृताच्छङ्कमाना दुःस्थिताद् दुरवेक्षितात्।
दुरासिताद् दुर्व्रजितादिङ्गिताध्यासितादपि॥
सूर्यवैश्वानरसमान् सोमकल्पान् महारथान्।
सेवे चक्षुर्हणः पार्थानुग्रवीर्यप्रतापिनः॥

"I am always careful not to permit any wrong word to slip from my lips. Like uncultured woman I do not stand here and there. Like other shameless women I do not cast my eyes everywhere. I do not sit on a wrong and improper place. I always try to avoid evil conduct and am quite alert that even my walking may not be unmannerly. I scrupulously follow even the hints of my husbands. My husbands are lustrous like sun and fire and at the same time soothing like moon. They are all great warriors and capable of killing their enemies through their glances only. They are terribly strong and splendrous. I always keep myself busy in serving them."

—*Mahābhārata, Vana Parva* (233. 21-22)

A woman smells sweetest, when she smells not at all.

—*Plantus*

Female Education—Swāmī Vivekānanda's Views

—Swarnabha Bhattacharyya

Historically speaking, Swāmī Vivekānanda's views on the proposed subject got a distinct place in renascent India under British Rule. The views are markedly different from two contemporary trends of thought, flowing contrarily in the form of movement. The first one drew its vitality from European Renaissance and throbbed in the heads of some English-educated Indian reformers with the occidental ideals of rationalism, naturalism, optimism and humanism. These reformers found fault with almost every social practice of the Hindu women and held Hindu religion responsible for the so-called malpractices like child-marriage, *Satī*, non-sanctioning of widow-marriage and female education, etc. Contrariwise flowed a kind of revivalist movement with an unreasonable approach for the wholesale negation of everything that could pass in the name of 'modernity'. Dogmatic traditionalists who upheld this movement failed to keep up with the dynamic spirit of the society and to grasp the spirit of the laws enjoined by our old scriptures. Vivekānanda took his stand in-between these two extremes by advocating eternal Vedantic gospel of man's immortality, and falsity of the world show.

He opined that the position of Indian women should be judged not by the Western hylic criterion, but by India's age old standard of spirituality. With sharp intellect, infinitely sympathetic heart and deep spiritual insight Vivekānanda tried to discover the ideals that for aeons have guided the social life of Indian women—their thoughts, feelings and activities. And

he found that it lay in their chastity. In a lecture delivered in Chicago on "Women of the East", Vivekānanda said, "The central idea of the life of a modern Hindu lady is her chastity...The Hindu women are very spiritual and very religious, perhaps more so than any other women in the World". Realisation of this inner ideal of Hindu women emboldened him even to announce before the learned audience of the West, that it was the extreme of this idea of chastity that caused Hindu widows to be burnt—at a time his innocent countrymen were being villified for lending their customary support to *Satī*-burning. Over-shadowing the West-biased Indian reformers' hubbub, Vivekānanda roared in '*Svadeśa Mantra*'—"Forget not that the ideal of thy (Indian's) Womanhood is Sītā, Sāvitrī, Damayantī."

In a lecture delivered at the Shakespeare Club House in Pasadena, California, in 1900 A. D., on "Women of India", Vivekānanda pointed out three salient factors responsible for the unique social attitude and position of Indian women as distinguished from those of their Western fellow-sisters. Firstly, he asserted, "The ideal of womanhood in India is motherhood—that marvellous, unselfish, all-suffering, ever-forgiving mother...the mother is the ideal of love; she rules the family, she possesses the family......In the Western home, the wife rules. In an Indian home, the mother rules." This difference in ideal of family constitution helps us to understand why Indian women are more prone to performing duties and sacrifices than to enjoying rights and pleasures of their own.

Secondly, the manners and customs of the Hindu Women and men as well are socialistic in attitude and not individualistic like those of the people of the Occident. To quote the language of Vivekānanda,".....the Western man is born individualistic, while the Hindu is socialistic—entirely socialistic". Hindu women are taught from their early girlhood to sacrifice their personal likes and dislikes for the sake of the welfare of the society at large. This fact can provide us with ample reason

why casteism plays a vital role in matrimonial alliance between a Hindu man and a Hindu woman. It is still believed that mixing of castes at random or promiscuity brings forth impish progeny detrimental to the society, nay to the whole human race."......forget not that thy marriage, thy wealth, thy life are not for sense-pleasure, are not for thy individual personal happiness......"—thus ran Swāmījī's invigorating call to the nation.

Thirdly, Indians are out and out a spiritualised nation with *Mokṣa* or liberation set forth as the *summum bonum* before them. In the above mentioned lecture delivered in California, Vivekānanda observed, "The ideal of Indian race is freedom of the soul. This World is nothing. It is a vision, a dream. This life is one of many millions like it. The whole of this nature is *Māyā*, is phantasm, a pest-house of phantasms. That is the philosophy." Hindu society has, from time immemorial, been tried to be built on this philosophy. Women being part and parcel of this highly spiritualised society have unlike the women of the West, refused to claim their rights to personal freedom of ephemeral sensuous enjoyments. Rather through penance and observance of arduous vows have they tried to restrain their lives with their household duties to be discharged towards their parents, husbands, progeny, etc., so that they can gradually attain *Mokṣa* or the final liberation from the agony arising out of the vicious circle of repeated births and deaths. To them it is foolish and an object of censure to make this temporary life a selfish pursuit after sensuous pleasure.

Vivekānanda did not think that the position of Indian women was inferior to that of the women of other so-called developed nations. He was bloated with pride to speak of the glory of the Vedic era when women like Vācaknavī, Gārgī, Vāk, Maitreyī etc., flourished to prove that the Aryan women enjoyed equal rights with men to education, wealth, and even to public debates and discussions. Manu also observed:

कन्याप्येवं पालनीया शिक्षणीया च यत्नतः।

But this sanctioning of inequality was derived as a logical corollary from the Vedantic tenet boldly asserting that there is no distinction of sex in the highest reality of *Parabrahma*. Women had an equal share in performing religious rites and sacrifices. In an interview with a representative of the journal, *Prabuddha Bhārata*, Vivekānanda remarked,".....according to the Aryan a man cannot perform a religious action without a wife." Vivekānanda contended that it is only in the *Paurāṇika* or the post-Buddhistic period that women's protection necessitated some curbs on their social and economic rights. "This, and not her inferiority, is the true reading of our customs" viewed Vivekānanda.

These considerations led him to criticise the Westerly fashioned reform measures like those taken for widow-remarriage. In an epistle addressed to his disciples in Madras, Vivekānanda wrote,".....the fate of a nation does not depend upon the number of husbands their widows get, but upon the condition of the masses." In a lecture on 'The people of India' delivered in Oakland, Vivekānanda observed that the child-widows or women who were betrothed to children who had died before marriage, might be pitied if marriage were the only real object in life, but, according to the Hindu way of thinking, marriage is rather a duty than a privilege, and the denial of the right of child-widows to marry was no particular hardship.

Yet Vivekānanda's heart ached and eyes moistened when he compared millions of starving and illiterate women of India with those of America in wealth, pleasures and smiles. For this he held the foreign invaders and rulers responsible mainly, and partly some self-centered hypocrites and oppressors who took advantage of the innocence of our pious womanfolks. He found that their old socio-religious rights had been cruelly curbed and they had, in fact, been made mere child-producing machines or slaves at the hands of men. The most liberal and humanistic maxims of *Vedānta* had been widely flouted and women's symmetrical progress along the way of fourfold ends of

Dharma, *Artha*, *Kāma* and *Mokṣa* had been largely thwarted. Vivekānanda lamented for *Gārgīs* and *Maitreyīs* not being produced from womankind of India. In a conversation with Sarat Candra Cakroborty, one of his Bengalee disciples, he remarked, "The principal reason why your race has so much degenerated is that you have no respect for these living images of *Śakti*." He strongly supported and oft-quoted the following saying of Manu:

यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः।
यत्रैतास्तु न पूज्यन्ते सर्वास्तत्राफलाः क्रियाः॥

"Where women are respected, there the gods delight; and where they are not, there all works and efforts come to naught." Vivekānanda believed that not only domestic welfare but national development also depends largely on the condition of its women. In his own words, "The best thermometer to the progress of a nation is its treatment of women".

Though Vivekānanda sympathised with the English-educated reformers in their efforts to raise the lower age level of marriage for girls and a kind of intermarriage between people of the same religion, he did not want to dictate Indian women what they should or should not do. He left the matter entirely with them to decide wherein their problems and prospects lie. In an epistle addressed to some of his close disciples in Madras he wrote, "Whether there should be caste or not, whether women should be perfectly free or not, does not concern me.....My whole ambition in life is to set in motion a machinery which will bring noble ideas to the door of everybody, and then let men and women settle their own fate." A true system of education is the machinery indicated here.

In the following words of his, we may sum up the nature of the machinery he wished to set in motion and the ways it should and could operate in:

"On the other side of the Gaṅgā a big plot of land will be acquired, where unmarried girls or *Brahmacāriṇī* widows will live. Devout married women will also be allowed to stay now and then.

Men will have no concern with this *Maṭha*.....There shall be a girls' school attached to this Women's *Maṭha*, in which religious scriptures, literature, Saṁskṛta, grammar, and even some amount of English should be taught. Other matters such as sewing, culinary art, rules of domestic work, and upbringing of children, will also be taught while, *Japa*, worship, meditation, etc., shall form an indispensable part of the teaching. Those who will be able to live here permanently, renouncing home and family ties, will be provided with food, and clothing from this *Maṭha*. Those who will not be able to do that will be allowed to study in this *Maṭha* as day-scholars. With the permission of the head of the *Maṭha*, the latter will be allowed even to stay in the *Maṭha* occasionally, and during such stay will be maintained by the *Maṭha*. The elder *Brahmacāriṇīs* will take charge of the training of the girl students in *Brahmacarya*. After five or six years' training in this *Maṭha*, the guardians of the girls may marry them. If deemed fit for *Yoga* and religious life, with the permission of their guardians they will be allowed to stay in this *Maṭha*, taking the vow of celibacy. These celebate nuns will in time be the teachers and preachers of the *Maṭha*. In villages and towns they will open centres and strive for the spread of female education. Through such devout preachers of character there will be the real spread of female education in the country. So long as the students will remain in association with this *Maṭha*, they must observe *Brahmacarya* as the basic idea of this *Maṭha*....Spirituality, sacrifice, and self-control will be the motto of the pupils of this *Maṭha*, and service or *Sevā-Dharma* the vow of their life.....If the life of the women of this country be moulded in such fashion, then only will there be the re-appearance of such ideal characters as Sītā, Sāvitrī and Gārgī." Thus he hoped for the brightest and the loftiest future of the Hindu women and laboured under this fixed belief. He unequivocally declared in a Chicago lecture, "If we can preserve these beautiful characteristics and at the same time develop the intellects of our women, the Hindu woman of the future will be the ideal woman of the World".

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The Dowry System and Killing

—K. C. Patnaik

"The self seeking man who is looking after his personal comforts and leading a lazy life—there is no room for him even in hell."

—Swāmī Vivekānanda

Our present day society is fraught with myriad social evils at the moment, one of the worst evils afflicting our society today is the dowry system which is playing a key role in marriages irrespective of caste, creed, race and colour. There has been never the case in the history of this ancient land where the dowry system came so much to the public focus as of now. The evil of the system has eaten into the marrow of the back bone of the society. The middle class, the opulent youths and their parents have proved to be the worst dowry sharks. There is a saying—"Human greed knows no bounds."

Circumstances of Dowry—

In good old days, the bride's parents used to give dowry in terms of cash and other items of movable property like jewellery etc., to their daughters at the time of marriage. Being old and customarily prevalent in ancient days in all the sections of our society the parents gave dowry voluntarily with a view that their daughter should lead a happy life in her in-law's house and also to maintain the social systems of their daughters in the society. For instance the king Janaka of Mithila kingdom voluntarily offered precious and valuable articles like jewellery, ornaments made of pearls and diamonds with some maid servants to render service to his daughter—princess Sītā at the

time of her being married to Lord Śrī Rāmacandra—son of king Daśaratha after selecting him by way of putting a garland around his neck as a symbol of her befitting spouse in presence of thousands of powerful magnificent kings and emperors like Rāvaṇa of Lanka, Bāṇāsura and such other mighty and ferocious demons in the open *Svayamvaram* which was then in vogue in royal families. In turn, the king Daśaratha had also given precious and valuable ornaments of high order to Sītājī at the time of marriage in token of *Kanyā Śulka* as per *Manu Śāstra* which was considered to be more authentic. There was also a custom prevalent in giving some movable property to the parents of the bride as compensation with a view to meet the loss of the bride's parents to some extent and also considering viable to the parents of the groom by bringing daughter (bride) from her parents.

As days passed on, at present in scientific era when the population burst out to one's beyond imagination, the voluntary offer of valuable ornaments, movable property to the bride by her parents at the time of marriage of their daughter gradually turned to dowry demand by the grooms' parents irrespective of her financial dignity and personality in society. It is amazing that even well educated parents of the so-called sophisticated youngmen, do not hesitate to such downright extortion—the victim of such avarice being the helpless parents of newly married girls who are pestered by their mother's-in-law and sisters-in-law in particular to bring more money and sophisticated consumer goods of various kinds.

In case the daughter's parents become obstinate due to their poverty or moral conduct, in giving dowry to groom's side at the time of negotiation, there is no chance for the parents to find a good boy for their daughters. It has also become in vogue with the parents of highly educated boys whether rich or poor to demand high dowry both in cash as well as in kind fixing a quantum of value according to the education and earning capacity of the boy. In some communities if the boy

is a Matriculate, the parents demand a dowry of Rs. 50,000/- if he is a post-graduate and unemployed, they would demand Rs. 1,00,000/-. If he is a Doctor, or Engineer or an I.A.S. or any Allied Officer, the demand will go up to some lakhs with a vehicle or good site in the heart of the city for their residential purpose.

The main objective of demanding dowry from the parent's side of the groom is that it is a source of good income like donation without any labour or investment of capital in any enterprise. By the adoption of this dowry the parents of the boy get their financial position sound by contemplating that the dowry is the media of easy way of earning money without any effort. Now a days in the present competitive age, all are busy in enriching the self-status. Generally the human instinct is if our neighbourer gets a Scooter or Fridge or such other sophisticated things by way of dowry we get fascinated and take recourse to preserve those valuable things in our homes in any easy way without any painstaking and maintain equal status. It is needless to say that inflicting untold oppression and or punishment on the unrescued girls with a view to extortion of dowry and valuable materials is nothing but barbarism.

Another point is that we have many social customs of conservative nature in our country and consequently excepting in a few educated families, where the castless and dowryless marriages are being performed, amazingly the other families throw cold water on such ideal performances on the plea that such marriages are being performed by poor people who have no means of funds or other sources. Many voluntary organisations have also been constituted to give a stand to such ideal marriages. It is a pity that the present materialistic society not only discourages such higher undertakings but also does not give proper respect to such learned and educated members they deserve.

The learning factor for dowry demand is that there are more daughters in comparision with sons in affluent society for which the parents of the brides resort to giving dowry as per the

requirements of grooms' parents on competitive spirit on the basis of groom's status and position in earning capacity with a view to dispose of their daughters giving in marriages. Some highly qualified persons by virtue of their high position and influence come forward to fulfil their desires in advance either by constructing well furnished residential quarters or offering luxurious vehicles at the cost of their own purse and capture the grooms' parents for giving their daughter in marriage to their sons. Such marriages are found common in the district of Northern Orissa in educated and aristocratic families. The in-laws take this opportunity and put pressure on her physically and mentally for bringing more such valuable articles from her father and keeping this in view they start torturing the bride even to the extent of taking her life.

Evil Effects of Dowry—

While the menace of dowry spread everywhere in modern age two new ironical aspects of the burning problem call for special notice.

(1) Brides are burnt alive by mother-in-law and other members of the family. Innumerable cases of young wives being burnt to death mercilessly (inclusive of suicides) are reported in the country every year. Those who compel the brides to bring more and more dowry as if the girls' parental homes are gold mines, are human sharks who must be adequately punished as per law.

(2) A recent study has shown that the extortions of this type and the burning or forced suicides which amount to the same tragedies, loss of life of young brides and cruel, ruthless victimisation for the sake of money is found common in educated and aristocratic families especially in Delhi, North India and Orissa in middle class families. Now this dowry epedemic disease has spread out in other leading cities of India in consequence of which it has become a curse for the poor parents who have to beg, borrow, or steal a huge money to meet the demand of dowry of the parents of the groom for the sake of the daughter's

marriage. Naturally, it causes a lot of suffering to the girl as well as her parents facing embarassing position in post-marriage stage. This evil practice is continuing even after marriage affecting the sentiment of the woman to a great extent and this makes her life more miserable and frustrated also and ultimately given vent to the commitment of suicide.

It is seen that some parts of the country are refrained from the evil of the bride burning though practice of demanding and giving ample dowry to the daughters at the time of marriage is widely prevalent there. Some peculiar incidents are found continuing in Orissa (specially Southern parts) which is disgraceful and a blemish to the so-called educated society. The parents of the daughter face untold difficulties at the time of marriage of the daughters. When the parents take the decision to give their daughter in marriage in a particular family, they visit the house of in-laws to see the groom with some valuable things in token of dowry. In case they are not prepared to give some quantum of valuable things as dowry, the parents of the groom do not hesitate to express their unwillingness to take up the marriage proposal of this particular family on some plea or other.

Last but not the least, such ugly incidents have also come to the notice through daily publications that after daughter's marriage the in-laws take atrocious action against the daughter's-in-law, which she is bound to tolerate. In case the financial position of her parents is not sound, she does not like to put more liability on her parents by visiting their house. In many cases, she prefers death for fear of public scandal for dowry rather than stepping down from her father's-in-law. The parents of the daughter thinking that they have accomplished their moral duty by giving in marriage to their daughter, do not take any interest to visit their in-laws' house for reconciling the problems of their daughter. Rather they insist on their daughter to stay in her in-law's house. In such embarassing position if the daughter is educated, she can some how or other maintain the situation,

but if the daughter happens to be uneducated, or a village girl, she cannot escape herself from the pangs of dowry scandal.

In some states of Northern India especially in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, parents dispose of their daughters by making arranged marriages by offering sufficient dowry without giving the scope to their daughter or son of the in law's side to have their personal choice. If any bitterness develops between them this ultimately leads the newly wedded couple to such an embarassing position that they would come forward for divorcing to each other or to take atrocious action on the bride.

In some cases, the parents of the girl with the proper understanding of the groom side settle the child marriage to save themselves from dowry havoc. This system is also not free from the scandals of atrocity when they cross the age of minority.

Remedial Measures—

Now there is a great demand by the people that evil of dowry should be eradicated completely. Many boys and girls are understood to have taken pledges not to accept dowry at the time of marriage. There is no doubt that until and unless the educated youths of the country come forward to eradicate this deep-rooted evil custom prevalent since last few decades from our so-called materialistic society, nothing tangible can be done to eliminate it once for all. Of course, some states like Uttar Pradesh, Punjab have also taken effective steps in this regard and fixed the amount of maximum dowry. They have also fixed the number of members who will go in marriage party to reduce the expenditure on marriage. Such ideal system should also be implemented in other states of the country to check this epidemic dowry disease.

Apart from the above suggestions made by the social leaders the daughter has to play vital role against the evil dowry system by taking active part in revolution for its eradication. The daughter being aware of the punishment for dowry-taking person, should not remain silent and take steps through

competent court by providing proper evidence for awarding punishment and realisation of proper dues for her maintenance. The womanfolk should raise their voice in protest of dowry not to marry the dowry seeking groom at all costs. The social and economic status of womanfolk should be kept at par with that of male members. In arranged marriages the brides as well as grooms should be given the opportunity to have the personal choice of each other. The parents of the daughter being aware of the fact that the birth of the daughter is for the house of an alien person, they should provide her sufficient education to the extent that could accommodate herself with the situation of her in-law's house and in worst cases she should devise ways and means for her maintenance independently. Sufficient arrangement should be made to give wide publicity to follow the ideals of *Satī* Sāvitrī, *Satī* Anasūyā and Sītā *Mātājī* for their dedication to the female society. Sermons of great *Ṛṣis, Sādhakas*, should be sufficiently propagated with coaching for developing strong self-confidence, discharge of moral duty assigned to her, rendering social service to the society, to keep herself engaged in productive avocation. She should extend her active co-operation with voluntary organisation constituted for eradication of evils of dowry. Sufficient incentive should be given to such voluntary organisations which have rendered laudable service through their expert planning for considerable checking of dowry disease.

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The highest of all feminine types in India is mother, higher than wife. Wife and children may desert a man, but his mother never. Mother is the same or loves her child perhaps a little more. Mother represents colourless love that knows no barter, love that never dies. Who can have such love ? Only mother, not son, nor daughter, nor wife.

—*Swami Vivekananda*

Status of Women in India

—Dr. Smt. Seema Dixit

Women are the part and parcel of society. Even then their status in Indian society is not so well as ought to be. The position of women was good in ancient time in our country, but at present they are synonym of neglect and discrimination—particularly the girl child. The condition is worst in rural areas and a little improvement is witnessed in urban areas of India. It is extensively and deeply rooted in a complex set of social, cultural and historical factors. The status of women in India, in most cases is with limited rights and considerable duties since her birth. The adverse sex ratio tells the story of her status.

According to our Prime Minister Śrī P. V. Narasiṁha Rao, there is an articulated and unarticulated distress for centuries, may be for millennia, wherein one half of humanity has been subordinated to the other half, the betterhalf to the worse half, and I really do not know why this should have happened. But I would like to say that this is the eternal question, the question of why there should be so much disparity between one part of God's creation and another part, both parts being completely interdependent, both parts being supplementary and complementary to each other, and both parts being such that neither part can become the whole in the absence of the other. It is just one of those inexplicable atrocities that mankind has inflicted on itself over the centuries. When in the old texts, it is said—"यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवता:", what happened to those texts? Were the words in those texts a piece of hypocricy to start with?

Was it that those who wrote them or conceived them not just one *Śloka* or one line, but long texts you find of people who could articulate these things from the bottom of their hearts, there was no diplomacy about it, no ostentation, nothing to show about. They wrote what they felt. These writings pertain to an age of wonderment, an age where man just expressed himself the way he felt. But in course of time, it disappeared and finally we come to a stage where it is said that one half of humanity is definitely inferior to the other (Arora—1979).

Status of the Women in Ancient, Medieval and Modern Period—

In ancient India, women have got honourable place in society. They were considered as indispensable part of human society. Many ancient women were so learned that they defeated the renowned learned *Ṛṣis* in discussion. We still remember Gārgī, Maitreyī etc., with respect and honour for their profound knowledge of *Vedas* and other ancient literature. They had got dignified position in the society of that time. Besides profound knowledge, many ancient women were famous for their courage and bravery. They used to go to battlefields to face the foes. They were also regarded and respected in the society. But it is a matter of deep concern and trouble that the women of modern society have lost the place and position which they had in ancient time. It has resulted in degeneration of the society as a whole. Now we are at critical juncture to reconsider and give the honourable and dignified place to women in order to develop our society alround.

Rigvedic literature testimonises that the Aryan Society was a free society in which man and woman had equal rights. Education, the base of human development, was open to both. Some of women were great scholars in spiritual field, wrote Vedic *Mantras* and verses. Girls were free to choose their husbands. Caste was no barrier in marriages. Unmarried girls had right to their parental property.

During the post Vedic period the free Rigvedic society

declined. The birth of a girl was not regarded as pleasant happening. Girls were not free. They were sold and purchased for marriage. They were given as gift by the kings in the marriage of princesses. Polygamy and *Purdah* was in practice whereas divorce had not emerged. Widow-marriage was possible. Female education was diversified as utilitarian and spiritual.

Epic age was a golden age in the history of women-freedom. A beautiful girl was regarded no less than a boy. She was honourable and had affected the then socio-political life upto a great extent.

Woman-freedom deteriorated again during Puranic period. Albeit education was open to all, yet it was a male dominated and patriarchal society. The whole of a woman's life revolved round her husband. Sometimes they were called as unholy.

By 100 A. D. during Manu's time they were forced to a state of subordination. Manu said—"By a girl, by a young woman or by an aged, nothing must be done independently even in her own home." During the second millennium the Mughal period restricted the women or female freedom by adding *Purdah*. No doubt it was proper for that time because most of the Mughal emperors were fond of sexual and luxurious life.

The modern period is the age of struggle for women-freedom. Our women are lagging behind their male counterparts in various spheres of life due to lack of literacy. Only 25 percent females are literate against 47 percent male. They are also much behind in job participation. As many as 13 percent women are employed in organised sector, 7 percent in unorganised non-primary sector and 80 percent in primary sector most of which are illiterates.

The above description is indicative of women-backwardness and subordination. If our society has to bring the women at par, we both man and woman must redefine our psychological attitude and extend our sincere support to women starting from our own home. Women themselves must make a multi-pronged attack to remove the barriers of their socio-economic independence.

The Government of India has also taken various steps to boost the socio-economic status of women in different fields.

Females in India are generally exploited in several ways, some become victims of deprivation and progressive pauperisation whereas others—victims of rape, prostitution, dowry-death and bride-burning. The problem of eve-teasing is also very acute. These atrocities on women continue to be on increase. Our social and cultural norms allow a sub status to female in India and they are treated as inferior beings. We often take the birth of girl child as curse and the birth of boy child as boon. Many parents do not allow their girl child to go for higher education on the ground that it will be difficult to get a highly-educated husband for her as for that they have to pay a huge amount of dowry. The participation of women in political and economic institutions is insignificant. Moreover, women participating in economic and political activities are seen through eyes of neglect and hatred. They are often commented as corrupt ladies. In spite of constitutional safeguards for women, the loopholes in our constitutional laws do considerable injustice to the women victims. There can be no diversification of opinion that the present status of Indian women is not satisfactory at all, rather it is below normal as compared with developed nations. Various women's organisations in India have been doing commendable job to uplift the cultural, economic and social status of women both in rural and urban areas. The New *Pañcāyata Rāja* Act has given thirty percent place to women from *Grāma Pañcāyata* level to *Zilā Pañcāyata* to boost the conditions of women in this field. Thus attempts are made to draw womenfolk towards main stream of the country.

Women in Hindu Culture

—*R. P. Gupta*

It is the atmosphere of peace that makes a home a real home, What is a home without the spirit of love and dedication pervading it. That spirit is centred in the housewife or the mother. We have the ancient saying that it is not the building that makes the home but it is the wife, the mother, the woman who has found peace in her heart that constitutes the home. In modern times you find beautiful, palatial buildings but inside them often live the most unhappy men and women. Tension abides in their hearts instead of peace. Many suggestions are given as to how to make the home look more beautiful through internal decoration but the fundamental thing is peace. This can be brought about only by religion.

Our country has produced many great women, a galaxy of bright stars in the midst of which shines Sītā like a full moon. She has been the source of perpetual inspiration for women not only in India but countries of South East Asia also. Let us recall what she said when dissuaded by Rāma from accompanying him to the forest. "Without you, O lord of my soul! there is nothing in the whole world that could give me any comfort. As the body without soul, as a river without water, so my lord! is a woman without her husband. With you, my lord! are all delights as long as I can behold your face that vies in brightness with the autumn moon.....Am I to be dainty and delicate while my lord roams in the woods? Is penance to be your portion and enjoyment mine? Do you think if you keep me at Avadha I can survive till the end of your exile?

O Jewel of wisdom! take me with you, abandon me not."And about Sītā, Swāmī Vivekānanda spoke thus—

"And what to speak of Sītā? You may exhaust the literature of the world that is past and I may assure you that you will have to exhaust the literature of the world of the future before finding another Sītā. Sītā is unique. That character was depicted once for all. There may have been many Rāmas, perhaps, but never more than one Sītā. She is the very type of the true Indian woman for all the Indian ideals of a perfect woman have grown out of that one life of Sītā and there she stands these thousands of years commanding worship of every man, woman and child through the length and breadth of the land of *Āryāvarta*.....Sītā has gone into the very vitals of our race. She is there in the blood of every Hindu man and woman. We are all children of Sītā. Any attempt to modernise our women, if it tries to take our women away from that ideal of Sītā, is immediately a failure as we see everyday. The women of India must grow and develop in the footprints of Sītā and that is the only way."

While answering the questions of *Yakṣa*, Yudhiṣṭhira admitted that *Dharma* (righteousness), *Artha* (wealth) and *Kāma* (pleasure) are opposed to each other and as such they cannot be acquired all at a time. Nevertheless, when *Dharma* and woman associate, when a woman has mastery over it and the latter is satisfied with the righteous conduct of a woman these three, forgetting their mutual antithesis can abide at one place.

यदा धर्मश्च भार्या च परस्परवशानुगौ।
तदा धर्मार्थकामानां त्रयाणामपि संगमः॥

From this it is clear that in *Gṛhasthāśrama* the responsibility of attaining *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kāma* rests with the woman. It is very difficult to establish one's sway over *Dharma* and men have been left out in this context altogether, the reason being that a man is not blessed with that competence. It is the exclusive possession of a woman. This explains why a wife in Hindu society is known as *Dharmapatnī*. After *Kanyādāna*

the father of the bride says to his son-in-law, "Henceforth in the pursuit of *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kāma* you should never neglect her company because she has now become your *Dharmapatnī*." In fact moulding of *Artha* and *Kāma* in the crucible of *Dharma* and thus sanctifying them is the aim of Hindu marriage. And because this can be achieved through women they are considered a potent factor in attaining *Dharma*.

To give birth to good children, their upbringing, performance of religious rites and rituals and service of the old and the infirm in the family is the domain of women. It is why great emphasis is laid on the protection and well-being of the womenfolk. Without them no religious rites are possible. Hence the scriptures say that men of noble descent should always strive for their protection and well being. With the demoralisation of women noble heredity of the family comes to an end, *Devayajñas* and *Pitṛyajñas* are no more performed, unrighteousness has its sway which results in total extirpation of the family. Bṛhaspati, the preceptor of gods has therefore instructed that even minor deviations from moral conduct should not be ignored and old women of the household, the mothers-in-law etc., should exercise due vigilence and control in this respect.

Keeping these things in mind Manu, the ancient law-giver opined that a man can ensure proper upbringing of his children, their proper education and development, their initiation in religion only when the womenfolk are well-looked after.

स्वां प्रसूतिं चरित्रं च कुलमात्मानमेव च।
स्वं च धर्मं प्रयत्नेन जायां रक्षन् हि रक्षति॥

Family life in India with the successful integration of *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kāma* by its womanhood is well-known throughout the world. Whenever Duryodhana approached his mother Gāndhārī and prayed to her for his victory in the war she would tell him, "O fool, you should strive for righteous action because victory is always there where righteous action is."

शृणु मूढ वचो मह्यं यतो धर्मस्ततो जयः।

Men by nature aspire for happiness which cannot be attained before liberation or *Mukti*. Still people whose *Gṛhasthāśrama* stands on the solid foundation of righteous experience, happiness in sufficient measure in their life.

Our history has been inspired by thousands of women who attained peace and poise through their spiritual life and these values have become the characteristics of Indian womanhood. We had Gārgī and Maitreyī in the Upanishadic age who participated in the intellectual and spiritual life of the age and many others in the later middle ages. References occur here and there in later texts regarding girls mastering at least parts of the *Vedas*. By the time of the *Smṛtis* however, around the beginning of the Christian era Vedic knowledge was closed to women.

India has always upheld the spiritual equality of man and woman but in social practice there has been increasing laxity after the Vedic period due to vicissitudes of history. For the last about fifteen centuries women have lost more and more of their freedom and become more and more dependent upon man due to frequent foreign invasions and insecure social conditions. This resulted in stunting of their personality. To teach only the wife about her duties and to make the husband conscious of his rights and neglect his duties, is to upset the balance. A healthy society is the product of harmonious adjustment of rights and duties between wife and husband. It is in this sphere that Indian thought, with its spiritual view of man and life has much to contribute to men and women of the East and West.

Marriage is a joint adventure and a woman's role as wife with her love for chastity, purity, service and modesty is significant for its development. But fulfilment of her womanhood in the fullest measure is achieved by the wife in her growing into mother. Motherhood is a spiritual transformation of wifehood. The path of a mother lies through self-effacement which is a mark of her inherent divinity. Motherhood ideal is the highest reach of womanhood according to Indian culture.

Women in general, whether educated or not, attained to these

ideals in considerable measure. It is the vision that India has always held out before her women and her daughters have struggled to realise these in their lives. The practice of *Satī* itself was the result of loyalty to the ideal of chastity in a chaotic society.

Some people say that women in Hindu society are treated as property of men. This is far from truth and a false propaganda. Our *Śāstras* have nowhere assigned a position of inferiority to women. On the other hand they have put woman on a higher level. The home in *Gṛhasthāśrama* has been described as 'गृहिणी गृहमुच्यते' the mistress of the home is the home and not the husband. He has been left out.

In marriage service the *Mantra* which the husband utters means, "Come and become the queen of my household. There is no mention of the man as king. In regard to status of women Manu is not satisfied with terms like equality, honour and respect for them. He speaks of worship. He says—"यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवता:" where women are worshipped there the gods love to dwell. Can there be greater veneration for women. Our scriptures enjoin upon us to look at every woman (except our own wife) as mother whether she may be a small girl. Surely there cannot be a loftier conception of woman than this.

Hindus have passed through the darkest days of Indian history when during about 500 years of Muslim rule and frequent invasions of barbarous hordes. They were physically overpowered and were subjected to heart-rending humiliations. In innumerable cases our women performed *Jauhara* in Rajasthan and at other places sacrificing their lives at the altar of fire rather than falling into the hands of *Vidharmī* felons, while their menfolk laid their lives fighting with the enemy. But their spirit could not be subdued.

It is therefore, a matter of profound sorrow that here and there we come across cases of some misguided educated Hindu girls willingly marrying outside the Hindu fold and embracing the religion of their husbands. It is the duty of our religious leaders and social reformers to prevent such obsessed girls from jumping out of their precious heritage and glorious past.

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Frailty, thy Name is Woman

—Dr. P.P. Sharma

This is a quote from Shakespeare's Hamlet but this does not by any means represent or express the immortal bard's attitude towards women. Shakespeare was writing a play and, the drama being the most objective of all literary genres, he had to introduce a large number of characters—good, bad and indifferent, with none of whom he could be indentified. That would be simplistic and preposterous. The person who utters these words is the young prince of Denmark whose uncle had seduced his mother and, in complicity with her, had killed his father. The mother Gertrude thus appears in very poor light, very feeble minded and utterly devoid of morel judgment. So filled with disgust Hamlet is that he calls the world "An unweeded garden/that grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature/possess it merely." Even before two months are over, she (Hamlet's mother) completely forgets her affectionate and devoted husband and inters into an incestuous relationship with a man who is so very inferior to him. To use his own grief-striken words—

That it should come to this :
But two months dead, nay, not so much, not two,
So excellent a king, that was to this
Hyperian (the sun-god) to a satyr, so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem (allow) the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly.....
Why she would hang on him
As if increase of appetite had grown

By what it fed on; and yet within a month—
Let me not think on't; frailty, thy name is woman—
......O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason
Would have mourned longer—married with my uncle,
My father's brother, but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules.....O, most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets !

As is evident, Shakespeare's intention here is to show what a sensitive and idealistic young man would feel about a depraved and sensual woman who has no thoughts to spare for her late husband. This cannot, however, be interpreted as a general censure of womankind. Has Shakespeare not given us a whole galaxy of witty and delightful and virtuous women in his comedies as well as cordelic in king Lear and Portia in the *Merchant of Venice* ?

In a larger perspective however, the Western view of the woman is definitely more earth-bound and mundane. If by the term 'frailty' is suggested weakness or lack of power of resistance or a proneness to be prevailed over as is brought out in the character of Hamlet's mother, then we can say that it cannot be described as a general trait of woman as they are portrayed in Western literature. By no stretch of the extension of meaning can a woman like Clytemnestra in Greek legend be called frail as she had her hands on all the ropes and conspires in collaboration with her paramour to murder her husband Agamemnon after his return from a ten year long war. They are anything but frail—those two monstrous daughters of king Lear, Goneril and Regan, that lady Macbeth, who twisting the tail of her husband, forced him ultimately to dispose of the honoured guest and the royal kinsman or that world-conquering coquette Cleopatra whose infinite variety time can never stale.

Anterior to all these, however, is Eve, the first woman according to the story in Genesis of the Old Testament. It was at her insistence that Adam was tempted to eat the forbidden

fruit from the tree of knowledge and the couple was expelled from paradise, or the Garden of Eden. In all these cases the woman is not so much acted upon as she is acting. It would appear that of man and woman it is the latter who is the more aggressive and initiates action.

The best known female character in the whole corpus of European literature is Helen of Troy, a never-fading symbol of feminine beauty and sexual attraction. It is her appearance that called forth Doctor Faustus rhapsodic line—"Is this the face that launched a thousand ships ?" It is highly intriguing that she remains absolutely unconcerned with the terrible havoc her infidelity has wrought.

Generalizations are always dangerous as by overemphasising one aspect they tend to obscure all others. Victorean fiction is literally strewn over with shy, for ever singing, long wishing, delicate and bashful maidens waiting patiently in the wings for their turn to make their debut in social life. Not inappropriately have they been compared to fragile ivies longing to cling on to their oaks. But then descended on the stage Henrik Ibsen, the Norwegian dramatist, who gave us Nora walking out of the house slamming the door in her husbands face, and that slamming reverberates to this day. In Hedda Gabler he virtually unleashed a diabolical force. Ibsen's Swedish contemporary August Strindberg goes even one better. His works are often based on the dual between the sexes: the woman, ruthless and domineering, asserts herself as the equal—if not the superior—of the man drives him to disperation and destruction by usurping his masculine prerogatives of decision and leadership.

The question that is bothering most of us these days is how to prevent the alarming incidence of divorce, how to prevent the breaking of marital bonds. Conjugal relationships have to be put on a sound footing. The solution does not lie, as the experience of the west has fully demonstrated, in woman becoming like man. There will be no end to rivalry

and one-upmanship in that competitive situation. But there should be no dictating of terms either by one to the other. There has to be a genuine meeting of the hearts with a frank and clear appreciation of each other's strengths and weaknesses.

The image of woman that comes out of our own literature is a glaring cantrast to what we have seen in the west. Says the national poet Śrī Maithilīśaraṇa about Yaśodharā, the wife of prince Siddhārtha when he has turned his back on while setting out on a spiritual quest—

अबला जीवन हाय तुम्हारी यही कहानी।
आँचल में है दूध और आँखों में पानी॥

In his epic poem *Sāketa*, he takes for his main theme the anguish and heartache of Ūrmilā whose husband has accompanied his elder brother Śrī Rāma to the forest. Tulasīdāsa's magnum opus dwells at great length on Sītā's vicissitudes and sorrows, her penances and trials during Rāma's exile. But are they—Sītā, Ūrmilā and Yaśodharā frail women, nervous, hesitant and unsure of themselves ? Can they be forced into an action that goes against their grain ? Consider for a moment the heart-melting pleadings of the wily Rāvaṇa to Sītā in the *Aśoka* grove, his fierce outbursts of anger and his blood-curdling threats. In the face of all this and surrounded by a host of demonesses, Sītā remained absolutely unruffled. Her gentle exterior concealed a hard core made up of her unwavering devotion to her dear husband. With him firmly installed in her heart, she could withstand all tortures and mounting pressures. Even her kindred were mistaken in thinking that with her gentle upbringing she would not be able to endure the severe austerities of the forest life. Ūrmilā's ordeal was no less. Separated from her dear husband she was engaged in the extremely trying domestic chores. As for Yaśodharā she did not let a sigh escape from her lips as she had to persuade Rāhula that his father was gone to bring peace and enlightenment for the whole world.

Indian literature is replete with glorious names of women

who showed unfailing courage, extraordinary moral stamina in pursuit of their noble objectives. Casting all considerations aside, Sāvitrī kept pursuing Yama, the god of death, until he was compelled to restore the dead Satyavān to life. No adversity could turn Damayantī away from her ill starred and woe-begone husband. What woman paid such a heavy price as Umā to obtain the husband of her choice ignoring the various discouragements from all related to her ?

The archetypal image of woman is to be found in the goddess Durgā, an embodiment of strength, valour and prowess. We are told in the seven hundred verses consecrated to her that not only could she hold her own against a numerous brood of demons but could eventually demolish and annihilate them. Thus it can be said that the words of Hamlet—"Frailty, thy name is woman" only reflect the highly biased view of a young man who has been living a scholastic life and whose only encounter with a woman was confined to his week-willed and depraved mother. In European as well as in Indian literature the woman is made of sterner stuff. Of course, there is a marked difference of ethos. The Indian woman as delineated in our literature, is far more firmly entrenched in spiritual values. One wishes and prays that it would remain so, eventhough the world is passing through a phase of terrible iconoclasm and nihilism.

To the Western mind these characters may appear quite natural but to the oriental mind particularly the Indian, it looks very funny and odd. Whether it is Gertrude or Portia of Shakespeare or Helen of Homer or even Helen of Troy they all and their behaviours do not appeal to the Hindu ideals. Immediately certain dramatic scenes flash in our mental eyes which are so very splendid and glorious. When Rāvaṇa, the mighty king of Lanka, catches the hand of Vedavatī the frail looking ascetic, she immediately says—'स्थिरो भव' and all the bodily strength of Rāvaṇa was totally paralysed. He became just like a wooden log. Of course the example of Sītā is running

in our blood-vessels. One may find innumerable examples of marital chastity in Hindu literature and history. Naturally an orthodox Hindu mind questions the ethics of western sexology. Very recently when Mrs. Kannedy visited the Tāja Mahala, she was overawed to see the splendour of theTāja,and spontaneously blurted "O ! how wonderful ! if Kannedy promises to build a monument like this in my memory, I am prepared to die this very moment." But just after the assassination of Mr. Kannedy what happened is the common knowledge. A Hindu wonders if the west has ever given birth to a Sāvitrī or Anasūyā. It cannot be wrong to believe that the entire structure of the materialistic philosophy of the west is the result of loose morality amongst the womenfolks. It is high time that the Western social philosophers must experiment on Hindu pattern of conjugal faith and fidelity.

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गुरुवत्प्रतिपूज्याः स्युः सवर्णा गुरुयोषितः।
असवर्णास्तु संपूज्याः प्रत्युत्थानाभिवादनैः॥

"The wives of preceptor if they belong to his (preceptor's) own cast, must be treated at par with the *Guru* but if they hail from an inferior class, their feet should not be touched. They may be paid respect to only by standing up with folded hands."

—*Manu Smṛti* (II.210)

How can a married man realize this renunciation ? If the husband and wife agree to bring about each other's pleasure, the matter can be settled even today. All the Bibles can do little good unless wives and husbands undertake to be each other's saviours or Christs.

—*Swami Rama Tirtha*

The Hindu Ideal of Successful Marriage

—Swami Jyotirmayananda

In a successful marriage, husband and wife must help each other to unfold their full potential. The two souls that the Divine Plan has brought together must reciprocate in a process leading to the attainment of the four purposes of life: ethical perfection (*Dharma*), material prosperity (*Artha*), joyous family life (*Kāma*), and liberation (*Mokṣa*).

If Self realization is kept as the goal of life, there will evolve the best type of harmony and love in the family. However, if this goal is not kept in view, love will degenerate into delusion. And married life, instead of promoting freedom of the soul for both of the marriage partners, becomes a source of misery and bondage.

No Superiority or Inferiority—

There should be no sense of superiority or inferiority between husband and wife. If the husband demands the right to be constantly dictatorial and thwarts the growth of the personality of his wife because of his ego, he is not following the path of righteousness.

In many families the husband treats his wife just like a puppet, requiring that she behave exactly according to his ideas. That is a degrading situation. In an atmosphere of tyranny and submissiveness nothing good can grow. When the husband's negative qualities are never opposed, his vanity goes on growing with time, and the wife's weakness develops into a subservient nature.

Rather, there should be an atmosphere of genuine freedom in marriage in which one is not afraid of holding onto what one understands to be true. To establish such an atmosphere

of freedom, it is important that householders understand the big psychological difference between humility and humiliation, between being humble and being submissive.

Under certain circumstances, a wise husband or wife will know when they are right about something, but will choose with humility to wait in expressing his or her opinion until a more opportune moment. In this manner, they maintain harmony without giving up their views or insulting their intellect.

To blindly accept and follow the wishes and dictates of your marriage partner when you are in disagreement with those wishes is building a relationship on a shallow basis. You cannot live in peace by going against your own understanding. There must be an environment of mutual freedom in which both personalities must evolve; and in that congenial atmosphere, their children will grow to be the best of men and women.

The Ideal Family—

The ideal family is like a spring garden. When you enter the home you sense the atmosphere of harmony and joy. According to the scriptures, an ideal family is blessed with the following:

Āśā (optimism): Everybody's face is full of hope for a joyous future. There is hope towards the unknown and unexpected. When you develop faith in God, you know that every situation that is to come is for your spiritual advancement. Then the unknown always gives you a thrill. If you know exactly what is to happen, life becomes boring. So in a healthy family, there is a sense of joy with relation to the future.

Pratīkṣā (waiting with patience): This quality is a blend of perseverance with patience. Whatever project you adopt, you do your duty well, and then wait and watch with a deep inner conviction that success is yours. The Divine Hand is guiding you.

Saṅgati (good company): You draw to your home ideal friends and well-wishers, and avoid the company of those who are uncultured. In addition you set apart a time everyday when all the family members may come together for a brief *Satsaṅga* (good association). At times you may invite your neighbours to join

in. The *Satsaṅga* may be conducted with prayer, *Kīrtana*, a brief recitation from the scriptures, or a well-planned study of the *Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, Bhāgavata, Gītā* or any scripture of your choice. You may conclude *Satsaṅga* with *Āratī* and distribution of *Prasāda* (sacred food).

Sukarma (righteous actions): You perform special actions for the good of people around you. In an ideal family, everyone is taught to amass the wealth of meritorious deeds.

Dāna (charity): Perform acts of charity and generosity. You may share your wealth, your knowledge and your talents for the good of others. The spirit of charity does not depend upon your material attainments. You may not be rich, yet you can bring the light of hope where there is the darkness and despair. You can infuse patience and courage in others. Dissemination of knowledge is the highest form of charity.

Ātithya (hospitality): Be hospitable to people who visit your home. You are serving God in every guest that comes to you.

The Spirit of Yoga—

In daily life, perform your duties—no matter what they may be, no matter how big or small—in the spirit of *Karma Yoga*, considering every action as an offering to God. Whether you are attending to your child, doing household chores, balancing your budget, adapting and adjusting in relationships—perform those tasks in the spirit of *Karma Yoga*. View your life as a grand opportunity for worshipping God in various ways. This is the secret for an enduring relationship that is blessed with peace, prosperity and harmony.

See the Divine in Each Other—

Every husband should develop the attitude that it is *Devī* (the Goddess) who abides in his wife, and thus he should adore her. And every wife should feel that it is God (as Kṛṣṇa or Rāma or any other manifestation) who is being worshipped in her husband. The scriptures say—"यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः"—"Where women are worshipped, there the Gods rejoice."

The attitude of worship in a broad sense implies a profound

reverence for the soul of each other. With this attitude, there evolves an ideal love—a love that sacrifices, that waits with patience, that is ever intent upon being helpful and compassionate. Such a love is not thwarted by adverse conditions of life; rather, like the moon it shines brighter and brighter as the clouds of adversity pass on.

Seeing and worshipping God in each other creates a sublime setting for a secure marriage. In such an environment there is no dread of disharmony. That type of family is like a tree that can allow itself to be shaken violently in wind, yet does not break. Husband and wife can openly quarrel, openly express their views without feeling that they are shaking their inner foundation of unity and love.

The Hindu Ideal—

According to the Hindu ideal, husband and wife are enjoined to be true and faithful to each other. That sexual fidelity promotes a deeper unity and enhances the spiritual well-being of the family. Also, according to the Hindu ideal, marriage is indissoluble. Husband and wife become loving companions for life—with the wish that if the bondage of *Karma* has not dissolved at the time of death, they might continue to be companions in future lives as well.

However, under certain unusual marital conditions, Hindu tradition allows for *Āpaddharma*—duty in exceptionally distressing situations. If husband and wife are extremely ill-matched, if the husband batters his wife, or the wife torments her husband without any reason or rhyme, then nothing material or spiritual can be gained out of that union. Orthodox people may still insist that they should continue to stay together for the pride of the family and for maintaining the old tradition, but in the light of truth, it would be better if they separate, and live their lives without the constant conflict, mental torture and degradation.

This however does not imply that a person should continue to marry and divorce, led by his whims. A marriage should not be broken up simply because there are impediments. Rather

there must be a deeper love that transcends impediments. Keeping the spiritual purpose of life always in view, adjustments must be made—with love, understanding, self-restraint, adaptability and sacrifice—to maintain stability in the marriage.

Every Situation is Helpful for Your Evolution—

There was a saint whose wife was always bitter and quarrelsome. No matter what he did, there was always turmoil at home. Instead of finding fault with her, he used to say, "Oh God, how great you are that you have given me a wife who continues to inspire *Vairāgya* (dispassion) in my heart. She always reminds me that this world is imperfect. I do not have to go to an *Āśrama* to acquire *Vairāgya*—I can get it right here!"

Socrates had that type of wife. One day when Socrates was talking to his disciples, his wife was shouting a lot. He turned to his disciples saying—"Thundering clouds seldom rain." After a while, however, she dumped some garbage on his head and he turned to his disciples again and said—"Well, I suppose that sometimes thundering clouds do rain!" He viewed all that happened in his marriage in a dispassionate way.

There was another saint whose wife was loving, sweet and ever ready to please her husband. The saint used to thank God, saying—"Oh God, You are so merciful that You have given me a wife who is so agreeable and loving. She encourages me at all times and keeps me free from worries so that I can devote myself to You."

The dispassionate vision of these saints teaches you that when you turn to the goal of Self-realization, you view every situation as helpful towards the attainment of that goal. In other words, your mind should not nurture the strong egoistic concept: "If I had been married to someone else, I would have been much better off." That is a big illusion. No matter what the personality of your spouse may be, there is a meaning behind the relationship. Further, with spiritual insight, you may bring about a great transformation in your husband or wife. Divine Love conquers all obstacles.

When you turn to the Goal of self realization, you view every situation as helpful towards attainment of that goal

The Concept of Marriage in Spiritual Evolution

—Dr. P. S. Venkateswaran

The cultural tradition of India is so sublime as to exalt marriage as a sacred union. The partners merge their individual identities in the conception and gradual perception of their ultimate realisation. The Supreme realisation has been expressed by the *Ṛṣis* as—"सोऽहम्, सच्चिदानन्दस्वरूपोऽहम्, बोधोऽहम्" i.e., I am He—the infinite spirit of life behind all, the Supreme Reality, the Consciousness, Bliss, Supreme Awareness, the Source of all Powers, Wisdom and Bliss.

With this conception and determined effort at a gradual perception of the ultimate Reality, each partner utilizes each other's mutual services for individual spiritual evolution. In this process, their roles are complementary; there is no question of any superiority or inferiority, both are equal, the happiness of one depends on the happiness of the other.

In *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, the sage Yājñavalkya instructs his wife Maitreyī, who is an embodiment of all wisdom, in this manner—

न वा अरे सर्वस्य कामाय सर्वं प्रियं भवत्यात्मनस्तु कामाय सर्वं प्रियं भवति।

(II. 4.5)

"O dear verily, it is not for the love of this all, that everything is dear, but for the sake of the Self is everything dear." The mundane love one has for his wife, children etc., is not merely out of consideration of their welfare and well-being. It is really an instinctive love of one's ownself, of which one is usually unaware and whose natural expression and embodiment they are.

आत्मा वा अरे द्रष्टव्यः श्रोतव्यो मन्तव्यो निदिध्यासितव्यो मैत्रेय्यात्मनो वा अरे दर्शनेन श्रवणेन मत्या विज्ञानेनेदं सर्वं विदितम्॥

(*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* II. 4.5)

"Verily O Maitreyī ! this *Ātmā* (i.e., Self, the source of I-consciousness) is alone worth realisation. It should be heard (from a realised saint), reflected on through logic and meditated upon. When this process of hearing, reflection and meditation is continued regularly and they merge one upon the other; the *Ātma* is really seen and understood, whence, everything here becomes known.

The effort for the attainment of something tangible in *Sādhanā* and one's marrying for his secular needs and purposes are not contradictory. It will be a very high and noble thing, of course, if the spiritual aspirant, steadfast in attaining his goal of cosmic consciousness, does not marry and takes to a life of renunciation and meditation. This requires tremendous will-power, strong resolution and a life of denial and intense control of the mind and sense-organs. Such blessed aspirants are very few indeed. If one has in the recesses of one's heart, any desire to share one's life and physical experiences with one of the other sex, if one had and clinging to worldly attainments, such as a good job, money, a good house, social position and such else; provided one is not resolutely intent upon entering a life of *Saṁnyāsa*, that is a life of utter celebacy, absolute poverty, purity and dwelling upon God (meditation), and thereby sublimate all these mundane traits and dash straight skilfully like a *Sāṅkhya* to the human goal of Supreme realization, encountering anything and caring nothing else en route; the best course would be to marry and then proceed towards the goal with some adjustments. The period of travel would only be a bit lengthened, that is all. Slow and steady, however, wins the race. Such souls who marry and sincerely proceed with their endeavour are anyday better than many of the pretending *Saṁnyāsīs*. Otherwise there is always the obvious likelihood

of failure with the consequent psychosis and disrepute of the holy order of *Saṁnyāsa*.

Marriage can however be utilized as a training ground for exercising self-control. Sex urge is not to be suppressed but sublimated completely through ceaseless meditation and consequent realisation. During the process of sublimation, one may have intimate physical experiences as felt necessary. This should, on no account, be considered as a sin but as an outlet, enabling him to exhaust his innate tendencies and come out absolutely free from such desires. But one should no more be a slave to his impulses, but on the contrary, gain mastery over them, conserving his energy and utilizing it for higher purpose for realizing his oneness with the Supreme Reality, the substratum behind everything.

Further, it is only those possessing real self-control, who can enjoy their sense-pleasures when they give themselves to such enjoyments. *Yogī* Bhartṛhari has written in his *Vairāgya Śataka*—

एको रागिषु राजते प्रियतमादेहार्धहारी हरो
नीरागेषु जनो विमुक्तललनासङ्गो न यस्मात्परः।
दुर्वारस्मरबाणपन्नगविषव्याविद्धमुग्धो जनः
शेषः कामविडम्बितान्न विषयान् भोक्तुं न मोक्तुं क्षमः॥

(17)

Śiva is the unique personality among all sensual persons, for he shares half of his body with his beloved. But among the dispassionate, there is none supreme to Him, as He is completely unattached to the company of women. (In his mental state of equipoise of *Yoga*, pain and pleasure are the same to him, and he is not at all affected by them). The rest of mankind being smitten by the irresistible serpent like poisonous arrows of cupid and brought under the infatuation of love; can neither enjoy their desires nor renounce them at will. They consequently suffer in many ways.

One can reach perfection only so long as one is moderate in the indulgences of all his senses. In *Gītā* Lord Kṛṣṇa declares—

युक्ताहारविहारस्य युक्तचेष्टस्य कर्मसु।
युक्तस्वप्नावबोधस्य योगो भवति दुःखहा॥
(VI. 17)

The practice of *Yoga* annihilates all pains, that is, confers infinite peace, Supreme bliss and eternal satisfaction for one, who is moderate in the indulgences of all his senses, and recreation, moderate in his activities and his sleep as well as wakefulness. Here the word 'आहार' is to be taken as 'आह्रियत इति आहार:' that which attracts a man that is, all sense-objects, not merely food alone. One can be deemed to be a real *Yogī*, only if one is able to remain unmoved in the midst of all the temptations. If this ideal is lost sight of, marriage turns out to be another legalised prostitution.

The limiting of progeny as well as spacing of children should materialise through self-control. It is, however, a sad state of affairs that wrong education, combined with the missionary zeal of the propaganda for family-planning has prostituted the minds of young boys and girls of impressionable age, who manage to get hold of contraceptives and utilize them for satisfying their animal passions without having the necessity to undergo the consequences. In effect, marriage loses the charm and sanctity attributed to it. In this connection, the observations of master physicians are worth pondering over. Dr. J. C. Burnnet (M. D.) has remarked in his book *Organ Diseases of Women* as indicated below—

"The prevention of conception by married women uniformly results in various chronic ailments, such as shrivelling of breasts, diminishing of lovely female characteristics, neurasthenia, and other dyspeptic troubles." Dr. J. T. Kent, A. M. M. D., asserts in his book *Lectures on Homeopathic Philosophy*, as follows—

"The nasty little methods of avoiding the bringing forth of offspring prevent the father and mother from being cured of their chronic diseases."

On the contrary, every exercise of self control brings in

its train more peace of mind and bodily vigour and greater strength to face all problems in life. Psychological upsets arise only in cases where one has been trained to believe that sexual accomplishment is the one and only object of supreme happiness worth achieving, is much after it and does not get the necessary circumstances and environments for achieving this fully. Upsets also arise because of over indulgence. It however does not arise where one is convinced of his origin and rightly knows that sex pleasure is only transitory, taking him further and further from his perfect stage of eternal peace that passes all understanding. *Brahmacarya* is the only sure foundation over which the superstructure of spiritual progress can be built up. Such a self-restraint is possible and will in due course, become natural without any conscious effort for one who is endowed in gradual stages of development with right enquiry, correct analysis, true discrimination and ultimate realisation.

Parents with self-restraint and spiritual ideals will bring forth healthy and intelligent children. Such children will have a spiritual bent of mind and progress in the path rapidly. Lord Kṛṣṇa says in the *Gītā*—

शुचीनां श्रीमतां गेहे योगभ्रष्टोऽभिजायते॥
अथवा योगिनामेव कुले भवति धीमताम्।
एतद्धि दुर्लभतरं लोके जन्म यदीदृशम्॥

(VI. 41-42)

Such souls, who were endowed with full faith and desired to attain the supreme, but were unable to attain complete perfection, because of their previous material tendencies, will be born again, either in a holy or rich family. Here they will have all opportunities for their self development. But the birth in a family where the parents are *Yogīs* or have advanced sufficiently in the spiritual path, is a rare one. These children will be great assets to the parents, country and the world at large.

The ideal of Hindu marriage facilitates the full growth and development of the husband as well as the wife and promotes

the preservation and progress of the society and its culture.

This naturally implies uniform sexual, moral standards from the male as well as the female. The discrimination against the fair and gentle sex, especially as regards moral standards as well as in other respects, were permitted by some latter authorities of Hindu Law or *Dharma Śāstras.* It might perhaps have been suited to the special social conditions then prevalent. They had however the intuition and foresight to express that the rules themselves are not absolute. The rules, if in the long run, are found to be not conducive to the welfare of the society in the changed circumstances and conditions, should be modified without the least hesitation. Such discriminations are evidently against the highest traditions of the culture and civilization, to which we are heir to. The demand for dowry either by the bridegroom or his near relations is absolutely against the spirit of our culture and only indicates how low such individuals have stooped to. This is in obvious violation of the noble call for 'अपरिग्रह' or non-covetousness, an important principle of 'यम' or restraint the very first step among the eight steps of *Rāja-Yoga.*

This is the conception, a high and sublime one of marriage, according to ancient *Ṛṣis* and prophets, some of whom had themselves led to the life of householders. They had made exhaustive analysis and intense research over problems in all spheres of life—physical, mental, intellectual, material, moral and spiritual and attained perfection and tasted the undecaying bliss of the superconscious state and proclaimed the truth to the world from time immemorial thus—

इह चेदवेदीदथ सत्यमस्ति न चेदिहावेदीन्महती विनष्टिः।

(*Kenopaniṣad* II. 5)

If one knows the truth right here and now, well, it is good, his life is fulfilled. Otherwise, it is the greatest loss and he perishes.

Happy Married Life

—R. N. Lakhotia

A couple has recently celebrated golden wedding anniversary. He is a successful small scale industrialist. His wife is a housewife. They are perfectly healthy and cheerful. They lead a happy married life so much so that their example is quoted by the neighbours to be emulated by others. In the same locality lives one executive officer in a Bank who got married five years ago. Both husband and wife are often seen quarrelling over trifling matters. The wife—a Bank Executive does not bother for the views of her husband. Rather, she insists on acceptance of her views by the husband in most matters. It is learnt that they have decided to seek a divorce or judicial separation. There are crores of happily married couples like them in our country. But, the number of such couples is increasing particularly in cities and among the educated families. The cases of marriages amongst educated families breaking up within 5/6 years of marriage and resulting into divorce are becoming very frequent thereby posing a grave threat to happy married life, a very important goal for this worldly life.

The question that is often asked in the light of the modern trend of married life is—"Can the disruption of married life be prevented and is it possible that most married couples lead a happy married life ?" The answer, based on my personal experience, observation and reading is in the affirmative. Hence, in this article, I have given practical hints for the married couples, particularly, the educated ones in the urban areas to lead a really happy married life and enjoy the bliss of married life itself.

Duties of Both Husband and Wife—

It was Herbert Louis Samuel who rightly said—"It takes two to make a marriage a success and only one a failure." This quotation should be remembered by both partners to marriage. Hence we are giving hereunder certain practical rules to be observed by both husband and wife to lead a happy married life—

(1) The importance of happy married life for companionship in young age and old age, for giving the best to the children and the family and other relations and the society, is great. Our *Śāstras* have emphasised the ancient values of happy married life which must be sincerely accepted in principle by both husband and wife in mutual interest. Phyllis Mc. Ginley rightly says—"In a successful marriage, there is no such thing as one's way. There is only the way of both, only the bumpy, dusty, difficult, but always mutual path."

(2) Both must make a firm resolve to make their marriage a happy one. For this, there should be one mind. It is rightly said in *Ṛgveda* (X.95.12), "Who can ever separate the married couple of one mind." It would certainly help in making the married life a happy one if they believe what Eden Phillpotts said—"A happy marriage is still the greatest treasure within the gift of fortune." This requires a spirit of sacrifice, particularly over trivial matters and willingness to admit mistakes and not to gloat over the mistakes of others. In this regard, it is better to adhere to the very salubrious advice given by Ogden Nash,

"To keep your marriage brimming,
With love in the loving cup,
Whenever you're wrong, admit it,
Whenever you're right, shut up".

How I wish this sane motto were followed by couples who decide to separate themselves. They should care more for their duties and talk less or nothing about their rights. It is for the other partner to look to the care of the spouse and not to press

one's own point of view. Rabbi B. R. Brickner has rightly said—"Success in marriage is much more than finding the right person; it is a matter of being the right person."

(3) The foundation of a happy married life is mutual trust and unflinching loyalty to each other. It has to be displayed throughout married life for making the married life, a very happy one. There should not be any room for suspicion. Rather there should be very honest and straightforward communication between husband and wife so that there is no room for suspicion. David R. Mace has rightly said—"A close relationship like marriage becomes unworkable if it is not based on truthful and straightforward communication between husband and wife." This advice is to be followed in actual practice by all couples who want to enjoy the bliss of happy married life.

(4) Married couples must resolve to lead a spiritual and religious life. They must have love of God or the spirit or the self. For a really happy married life, it is essential that they should be strictly vegetarians. They must avoid alcoholic drinks, smoking and gambling. The great Tamil saint Tiruvalluvar in his immortal work *Tirukkural* (45) has emphasised these aspects of married life by saying that if the married life is based on *Dharma* and love, it is bound to be successful and blissful.

(5) Sometimes one is bound to be angry in actual practical life but they would do well if both are not angry at the same time. In this connection, the married couple would do well to hearken to the same advise of Mr. Robert Stein who said—"The late Dr. Randolph Ray, rector of the Little Church Around the Corner didn't believe in giving young couples long-winded advice on marriage. His usual parting speech was terse, nine-word-affair. 'Now', he would tell them with a smile 'Don't both get mad at the same time."

(6) Both should try to ignore the defects of others and adjust with the nature, behaviour and likings of the other partner. In this connection, Montaigne rightly says—"A good husband

should be deaf and a good wife blind."

(7) Often the troubles in married life arise because of the ego problem. It should be recognised fully well that there is no place for ego in married life. Rather both should have mutual respect for other's views and sentiments.

(8) One of the important aspects which is neglected by many couples is inadequate health care by the couple. Hence both husband and wife should, right from the beginning, take positive measures for the care of health so that even in old age they enjoy the bliss of good health and serious illnesses and diseases are not allowed to mar the joy of happy married life.

For the Husband—

Though the aforesaid points by both husband and wife are essential for a happy married life, yet there are certain aspects of married life which are more important for the husband. They are given below—

(1) The husband should never insult or abuse the parents of the wife.

(2) The husband should not insult the wife in public. Nothing hurts the wife's feelings as public insult. The sane advice of James Thurber is to this effect—"A husband should not insult his wife publicly, at parties. He should insult her in the privacy of the home." This may, however, be followed by the husband who sometimes wishes to express the anguish about the wife's attributes.

(3) A husband should respect his wife and make her feel happy. *Manusmṛti* (III. 56) has rightly emphasised this aspect by saying that a family enjoys divine bliss and has decent children where the ladies are respected. This is expressed in the very well-known phrase of *Manusmṛti*,—"यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवता:" (Gods dwell in the home where women are respected).

(4) As far as possible the husband must take his wife with him in social, religious and cultural functions and ceremonies. He should give her reasonable time by way of company and

should not be all the time engaged in work and his personal life only.

For the Wife—

In the modern days, the married ladies, particularly the educated ones are equally responsible for spoiling the joys of married life. Hence a few additional words of practical advice for them are given below to make the consummation of a happy married life a reality—

(1) The wife must have very sweet temper. *Atharva Veda* (III. 30.2) has rightly advised the wife to speak to her husband in sweet, loving and comforting words all the time.

(2) An obedient wife is the *sine qua non* of a happy married life. Cāṇakya says in *Cāṇakya Nīti* (II.3)—"A person whose wife is obedient and who is satisfied with the wealth, earned by him achieves heaven in this world itself."

(3) A wife should believe in the ancient virtue of *Pātivrata Dharma*. The examples of Sītā, Damayantī and Sāvitrī will continue to be the ideal examples for all times to come particularly for making their married life a happy one. *Cāṇakya Sūtra* (512) has rightly emphasised these points. In *Hitopadeśa* it is stated that, 'she alone is a real wife who is expert in household duties, has a child and who regards her husband like her own *Prāṇa* and who is obedient.'

(4) A wife who takes loving care of the house and specially the care to cook those meals which the husband likes, adds to a happy married life to such an extent that it cannot be described in words. *Manusmṛti* (V.150) says—"It is desirable for a wife that she should perform the household duties cheerfully and skilfully."

(5) A wife must show proper respect and take proper care of the parents and dependent relatives of the husband. This adds to the joys of married life.

(6) A good wife, an intelligent wife, must know the likes and dislikes of the husband and should try to adjust herself

and take care for the likings of her husband, particularly those which are not against the law and religion.

We are sure that if both husband and wife follow the above practical hints they will certainly succeed in achieving a miracle in this life, viz., a happy married life.

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अहंकारं विहायाहं कामक्रोधौ च सर्वदा।
सदारान् पाण्डवान् नित्यं प्रयतोपचराम्यहम्॥
प्रणयं प्रतिसंहृत्य निधायात्मानमात्मनि।
शुश्रूषुर्निरहंमाना पतीनां चित्तरक्षिणी॥

"I, on my part, quite away from egoistic feelings, desire and anger, serve all my five husbands attentively and with great care. Not only this but I always make readily serviceable to their other wives also. Suppressing my desire and having full control over my mind I have only one desire and that is to gratify their wishes. I never allow any sense of pride or ego to raise its head."

—*Mahābhārata, Vana Parva* (233.19-20)

When a husband dies all his possessions go to his widow. If a widow is poor she is the same as poor widows in any other country. Old men sometimes marry children, but if the husband was wealthy it was all the better for the widow the sooner he died. I have travelled all over India, but failed to see a case of the ill treatment mentioned. At one time there were religious fanatics, widows, who threw themselves into a fire and were consumed by the flames at the death of their husbands. The Hindus did not believe in this, but did not prevent it, and it was not until the British obtained control of India that it was finally prohibited. These women were considered saints and in many instances monuments were erected to their memory.

—*Swami Vivekananda*

Motherhood

—R. S. Sengar

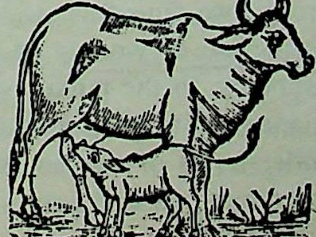
In our bleak earthly existence,
Thy name, O Mother, is pious,
Soothing, sweet, sonorous.

Bestowing goodness in profusion,
The Lord of entire creation,
Did resolve to send thee down
From the garden of Eden.

Motherly love, self-sacrifice,
Compassion and forgiveness
Are, indeed, thy noble virtues.

Thou art a symbol of divinity,
Thou art the life-force, verily.
Thou begeteth progeny, surely,
Preserving them painstakingly.

To express indebtedness to mothers,
We deify them as mother goddesses.



Any attempt to modernizing our women to take away from the ideal of Sītā is immediately a failure

The Indian Ideal of Womanhood

—*Dr. G. R. Vijayakumar*

"Any attempt to modernize our women, if it tries to take our women away from the ideal of Sītā is immediately a failure, as we see everyday. The women of India must grow and develop in the foot-steps of Sītā and that is the only way."

—*Swāmī Vivekānanda* (Vol. III, p. 225)

The most significant aspect of Indian culture is the idea of the innate divinity of man. Men and women and all beings are divine in their essential nature. Social evolution has incorporated this great value in the texture of our relationships. From it are derived the values of freedom, equality and the sacredness of personality. That forms the measure of social and cultural progress.

Among the various types of human relationships, that between man and woman is the most important. The status of woman indicates progress of any society or culture. History presents various phases of the evolution of this idea.

In the lower levels of culture this status is one of dependence in theory and practice, woman being meant as an object of pleasure to man, the stronger sex. But in the earliest glimpse of recorded Indian society, we find this stage already passed. The *Ṛgveda* presents a picture of woman as the equal to man in civic and religious spheres. In the pursuit of knowledge and virtue, in the performance of rituals, in the composition of hymns, even in the harder fields of war and statecraft, we find the Vedic women as a companion and help-mate of man. This equality in practice soon found its sustenance in theory. The

Upaniṣads expounded the idea of man and woman as the equal halves of a divine unity, each the component of, and incomplete without, the other. The *Upaniṣads* also discovered the real nature of man and woman to consist in the *Ātmā*, the sexless self, which is ever pure, perfect and free.

India has always upheld, in theory, the spiritual equality of man and man, and man and woman. But in social practice, there has been increasing laxity after the Vedic period, due to vicissitudes of history.

Indian thought views women exactly as it views man, as a person with a destiny. The search for this destiny makes her a pilgrim in search of worldly excellence and spiritual realization. In our culture, we find thousands of women who had attained peace and poise and fulness through their spiritual life, and these values have become the inalienable characteristic of Indian womanhood. We had *Brahmavādinī* Gārgī in the Upanishadic age who participated in the intellectual life of the age. We had Āṇḍāla and Mīrā and a galaxy of others in the earlier and later middle ages. And in the 20th century we have the unique example of holy mother Śāradā Devī, Ānanda Mayī Mā, Mother of Pondicherry, who occupy position of spiritual distinction.

In the sphere of worldly prosperity, the status of woman has suffered in the last 1500 years. Women lost their freedom and became more and more dependent upon men. They did not get the light of education, they were steeped in superstition; they did not have faith in themselves neither did they evoke respect from the menfolk, who treated them as far less than their equals. It was the surest index of the low scale of Indian civilization and culture.

But soon light shone into this dismal atmosphere. In 19th century great men and movements arose to bring cheer to our women's hearts and lives. Men like Rājā Rāma Mohana Roy, Īśvara Candra Vidyāsāgara, Swāmī Vivekānanda worked tirelessly to change the outlook of society towards women, and remove

Joint family - women did not get a chance to express herself

the chains from their minds and feet. Out of their efforts came greater freedom and opportunities for our women through education and social reform. The modern Indian woman is free to seek the most advanced intellectual development or pursue any social avocations. Today she does not feel herself as a competitor of man, but as his comrade, whose good wishes and help she values.

After several centuries, we see now, marriage is becoming a comradeship of equals, a joint adventure in the enrichment of society and the enjoyment of its delights. Under the old joint family, woman as wife hardly got the chance to express herself. The impact of modern world forces has broken down that joint family, making for the emergence of the wife as the queen of a limited household within, and as a citizen in an unlimited social field of endeavour without.

It is this ideal that is gripping Indian womanhood today. She prefers to be the queen of a limited household to being an obscure item in a large joint family. What is more, it is this ideal that the modern Indian man also seeks his wife to embody. He does not seek a dependent or plaything in his wife, but an equal in intelligence, strength of character, and social feeling; not a woman to worship or be worshipped, but a companion who has the strength and will to share his joys and sorrows, burdens and responsibilities. In this, we catch an echo of the earliest Indian social experience of the *Ṛgveda*. In this realization of the manhood of man and the womanhood of woman in the context of the equality of the marriage relationship, India recognises a significant experience of spiritual education. Here is the emergence of a family unit out of the welter of the modern transition which will form the nursery of the nation's morals, the school of its religious attitudes, and the integrated brick of its social edifice.

Two egocentric individuals in search of life-fulfilment and brought into the most intimate social relation, are husband and

wife in marriage. To realize this object of fulfilment they have to learn to give up themselves to each other before seeking to take from each other. To teach only the wife to give is to upset the balance and to make the husband learn to take and neglect to give, leads to less than fulfilment for both. The post-Vedic period of India leaned to this exaggeration and its literature is full of the duties of the wives and the rights of the husbands. While it helped women to develop sterling virtues it did tend to dwarf her full personality.

Similar difficulties have arisen in the West in the reverse way by the wife's standing on her rights, flimsy and serious, and largely forgetting that it is more blessed to give than to receive. A healthy society is the product of a harmonious adjustment of rights and duties between wife and husband, where neither value impinges harshly on the smooth functioning relationship.

It is in this sphere that Indian thought, with its spiritual view of man and life, has much to contribute to steady the feet of men and women in the East and the West. Man is not a static individual; the child grows into the boy or girl, and thence into the young man or woman, to end in the old man and old woman. Sex-awareness, which rises and gets strong in the middle two stages, tapers off at both ends. At some time or other, every husband or wife go beyond their sex-awareness to realize a glimpse of Self, the innate divinity present in them.

Indian thought proposes deeper realization of 'Self' beyond the sex-difference by both the partners. So far as woman is concerned, this is achieved by the wife growing into the mother, not merely biologically, but certainly spiritually. Motherhood is a spiritual transformation of wifehood. The wife demands and takes but the mother feels it her privilege to give. Within the limited circle of her motherhood, she is the example of self-transcendence through Self-effacement.

Motherhood ideal is the highest reach of womanhood according to Indian culture. This symbol of self-effacing love

has revealed the presence of a divine reality within, over and above the personality of the visible mother. To the Indian, God is the mother of all creation. A nation that has educated itself to look upon God as mother has learnt to invest its view of woman with the utmost tenderness and reverence. The Indian culture trains him to look upon all women, as forms of the one Divine Mother. The mother is more worthy of reverence than father or teacher according to *Manusmṛti* (XI. 145)—"From the point of view of reverence, a teacher is tenfold superior to a mere lecturer, a father a hundredfold to a teacher, and a mother a thousandfold to a father."

What constitutes this abundant glory is her self-effacing love and compassion. This is a mark of high spirituality and true culture. And women have the privilege to attain to those.

The old Indian woman has been nourished on the ideals of Sītā, Sāvitrī, Damayantī. In the limited world in which she functioned, these ideals sufficed to sustain her. But the woman of today, thrown into a world of wide opportunities, finds these ideals lacking in all-round nourishment. She requires an educational programme in which science and religion shake hands. Such a combination will result in all-round development and welfare. These will ensure the full manifestation of the glory of human nature, lighting up every aspect of human life, individual and collective.

So educated woman will realize her worth as woman and contribute her distinct share to the peace and prosperity of society. The modern woman's temptation to grow into the likeness of man is only a passing phase of this transition. Indian thought holds that by remaining true to one's own type, man and woman will eventually outgrow the sex-awareness in the realization of the *Ātmā*—the sexless Self, which is the true nature of both men and women.

It is worthwhile to ponder over the significance of the advice that holy mother Śāradā Devī gave to a visiting woman, soon after *Mahāsamādhi* of Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahaṁsa—"If you

want peace of mind, do not look for faults in others. Rather look out to discover your own weakness. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one here is an alien or a stranger, my child. The whole world is your own."

Rabia (767—815 A.D.) was a great saint of Islam like Āṇḍāla of Tamil Nadu (700 A.D.). Someone asked her whether she loved God. 'Yes' she replied. 'But do you hate the devil' they enquired. 'My love of God does not give me time to hate the devil' was her characteristic reply.

In such characters we find the ideal of Indian womanhood where a woman's home-making virtues through the expansion of the heart, makes the whole world a home.

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The world is in dire need of such ideal women. I wish that the world abounded with such glorious women. I do not condemn women. I do not oppose giving them education and freedom. I have the highest veneration for women, I adore them as *Devīs* (goddesses), but I am not in favour of such freedom for women as will ruin them. I am in favour of such education and culture as will make them immortal and glorious; that will make them ideal women, ideal wives like Sulabhā, Mīrā, Sāvitrī and Damayantī.

—*Swami Sivananda*

गोपशौण्डिकशैलूषरजकव्याधयोषिताम् ।
ऋणं दद्यात्पतिस्तेषां यस्माद्वृत्तिस्तदाश्रया ॥

"The husbands from *Gopa*, *Śauṇḍika* (the distillers of wine) *Naṭa*, *Rañjaka* (those who paint, print or colour the cloth), *Vyādha* (hunter) families or professions are responsible to repay the loan borrowed by their wives as they depend upon them for their livelihood."

—*Yājñavalkya Smṛti* (II.48)

Unsuitability of Women for Freedom

—Late Sri Jayadayal Goyandka

It is most blissful for the ladies if they are not free. The injunction which the seers and great souls of yore passed for the ladies to remain under the subordination of men, is the most beneficial. The *Ṛṣis* were very farsighted and they knew all the three divisions of time—past, present and future. Their experiences were most commendable. Those who do not know the secret behind, blame them and say that the ancient seers were tyrranical to the ladies that they deprived them of their freedom. It is a mistake on their part. Yet this is a topic worth considering. There is excess of desire, anger, rashness, obstinacy, want of reasoning, untruth, deceit, hardness, treason, meanness, unsteadiness, impurity, unkindliness and demerits like them. So they are unworthy of freedom. Tulasīdāsa enumerated several natural demerits—

नारि सुभाउ सत्य सब कहहीं। अवगुन आठ सदा उर रहहीं॥
साहस अनृत चपलता माया। भय अबिबेक असौच अदाया॥

"People rightly observe in regard to the character of a woman that the following eight evils ever abide in her heart—recklessness, mendacity, fickleness, deceit, timidity, indiscreation, impurity and callousness."

By their being free the evils like transgression of social norms, improper conduct and adultery—are on the increase. With the result that the country, nation and society suffer enormous harm. Keeping these things in consideration the seers like Manu said—

बालया वा युवत्या वा वृद्धया वापि योषिता।
न स्वातन्त्र्येण कर्तव्यं किञ्चित् कार्यं गृहेष्वपि॥
बाल्ये पितुर्वशे तिष्ठेत् पाणिग्राहस्य यौवने।
पुत्राणां भर्तरि प्रेते न भजेत् स्त्री स्वतन्त्रताम्॥

(*Manu*. V. 147-148)

"Whether a girl, a youthful lady or an old woman—(should not move freely outside the home) should not act even within the four walls of the house freely. In childhood she must be under the subordination of father, in her youth under the husband and after the expiry of husband under the subordination of sons but in no case she should remain free."

It is even practically observed that the ladies moving freely get spoiled. Due to the lack of knowledge, intellect and education also, a woman does not deserve freedom.

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The natural way suggested by *Vedānta* is to begin with those with whom you are connected; let your being merge in those who are near and dear to you. Let your interests be one with their interest; let all the bodies be welded into one; let them become one stream, and then go on experiencing. After that you can take other families in; and rising by degrees, let all families be as your own body; and after you feel all bodies as your own, you can realize your oneness with God; you can take each and all with you.

—*Swami Rama Tirtha*

मात्रा स्वस्रा दुहित्रा वा न विविक्तासनो भवेत्।
बलवानिन्द्रियग्रामो विद्वांसमपि कर्षति॥

"Wise men must not be in company of even their mother, sister or daughter in a lonely place. The senses are exceptionally strong and they deviate even the wise from the right path."

—*Manu Smṛti* (II.215)

An Idealist View of Indian Women

—J. R. Kamath

Life is compared to an omnibus which carries in it men, plants, animals and what not of various hues, tastes, sizes, shapes, predilections etc., variety as its essential characteristic or nature. There is no knowing when exactly the journey started and when it will end finally. Its ultimate destination, if any, is as much remote from today, as its starting point is. This is the toughest and even inevitable journey, which none can skip over even when it seems to have any chartered schedule. The omnibus is ever moving forward without halt, accommodating as it moves newer and newer passengers.

In spite of this variety and inevitability, one thing remains fundamental for the continuance of the journey itself, lest the omnibus suffer a breakdown in the middle for want of passengers, without completing its mission. It is necessary for that purpose that it should carry passengers to the unknown destination-travellers filling it all the time. For this purpose the author of the Omnibus had made provision for the multiplication of the travellers by grouping them as male and female. The process is going on eternally.

Ṛgveda declares that there is only one reality—''एकं सद् विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति'' which the learned describe differently. That reality is not 'He' or 'She', but only 'It', and yet it is both 'He' and 'She'. *Puruṣa Sūkta*, that Master Hymn in the *Vedas* describes that reality as *Puruṣa* possessing thousands of heads, hands, eyes, ears, etc., while possessing only one body, viz., the body of the *Puruṣa*. He functions multifariously and retains His

essential unity or oneness. The hymn proceeds to say that the *Puruṣa* sacrificed Himself (or His unity) and created seasons etc., or a world of duality. He sacrificed His infinitude and assumed the form of the finite. This sacrifice was made so that His created beings may also follow His example and make sacrifice as part of their lives. The created beings by such sacrifice enter into a spiritual commerce with the creator and then come face to face with Him. *Gītā* has further developed this concept of sacrifice.

Viṣṇu Sahasranāma towards the end mentions one of the name of Viṣṇu as "आत्मयोनि: स्वयंजात:". He is born out of His own *Ātmā* or fountain of His energy, forming it as it were, His womb. He thus formed both the material cause as well as the efficient cause of the universe. Every created being is thus part of the *Puruṣa* containing in it both the male as well as the female elements. Again the Lord is called by the name *Lakṣmīvān* meaning that Lakṣmī resides in the chest of the Lord permanently. She has thus no separate or individual existence. Both Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī constitute a single entity or personality called *Puruṣa*.

All this indicates that the male and the female are not independent of the other and that they are only complementary to each other. If the male is the *Ātmā*, the female constitutes the womb, so that this eternal principle is sustained in the creation. Both are energies. The difference between the male and the female energy lies in that the former constitutes the activising soul and the latter passively executing and methodising energy (vide *Lights on the Veda* by T. V. Kapālī Śāstrī p. 24). The power of the soul which is in the semen through the spirit enclosed therein fashion the body (vide *Summa Theologica* III. 32.11, cited by Dr. S. Rādhākṛṣṇan in *Principal Upaniṣads* p. 245). Women's function is the passive function of the soil which not only helps the tree to grow but also to keep its growth within limits. The tree must have life's adventure and send up and spread

out its branches on all sides. Its deeper bonds of relation are hidden and hold firm in the soil and thus help it to live (*Personality* by Tagore p. 172).

We perceive this gender difference in all created beings and yet at the same time sustaining the principle of unity. This principle of unity is well brought out in the Hindu concept of *Ardhanārīśvara* and *Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa*.

The above is a generalised concept of the male and the female or a husband and wife. The male provides the 'seed' or the *Ātmā* and the female 'the passive executing energy' while accepting it, fertilises it and brings out the species by the process of 'methodising energy' as part of its nature. In spite of these apparent differences a basic thread of unity is sustained in both.

It is in the light of this Vedic concept of male and female that the whole system of Indian family has been built up, by the *Ṛṣis* of yore. When Manu said that no woman deserves freedom—"न स्त्री स्वातन्त्र्यमर्हति" it was in accordance with the then prevailing custom and tradition in the society and also perhaps women by their own constitution and predilections play a subordinate role, they being only the methodising energy and who need protection. It is not a case of lowering their status in the society but instead with a view to uphold the highest tradition prevailing at that time. Jawāharalāla Neharū in his *Discovery of India* writes about this thus—"Bad as the legal position of women was in ancient India, judged by modern standards, it was far better than in ancient Greece and Rome, in early Christianity, in the Canon Law of mediaeval Europe, and indeed right up to comparatively modern times at the beginning of the nineteenth century" (p. 118).

Absolute freedom was not given to her because of the nature of her function.

Manu and Vālmīki—

Manu said that no *Strī* deserves freedom; probably he meant

absolute freedom. Woman because of her nature as 'methodising energy' has a subordinate role to play in the over-all picture of creation. She needs protection many a time. Manu gave the highest honour to women. It is not a case where woman is driven by the aggressive nature of man into the background.

Ṛgveda gives love and matrimony the most exalted status when it confers the divinity to the chaste and beloved wife. It says—"अनवद्या पतिजुष्टेव नारी" (I. 73.3). Let the spotless wife be loved by her husband; chastity in women is a godly quality. Again in (X. 85.46), *Ṛgveda* says—

Be a queen to thy father-in-law
A queen to thy mother-in-law
Queen to thy sister-in-law
A queen to thy brother-in-law.

It says—"A wife truly is home."

"The domestic world has been the gift of God to women. She can extend her radiance of love beyond its boundaries, on all sides, and even leave it to prove her woman's nature when the call comes to her. This is a truth which cannot be ignored. It commences the moment she is born in her mother's arms. She is born in the centre of her own true world, the world of human relationships" (Tagore in *Personality* p. 177).

Manu thus gave the woman the highest honour as is envisaged in the *Vedas*. By depriving woman absolute freedom Manu did not give her a subordinate position. What was subordinated was her function, eventhough it was not less important. *Strī* with reference to *Puruṣa* has a subordinate role to play. And yet we have women of the highest spiritual attainments, eligible for *Brahmavicāra*. Maitreyī in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* is an example. Manu wanted to preserve the highest traditions of the society of his day. He did not want to encroach upon the province of personal relationship and sentiment in giving way to law.

Our great Epics the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* expound this principle clearly. Vālmīki has painted Sītā in a most ideal

manner. "He has conferred on her all attractions that woman could conceivably have. Beauty, tenderness of heart, compassion of the extreme type, fidelity, wisdom of the truest type, courage of the heart, endurance (what has not Sītā endured) all these qualities find in her harmonious abode" (Lecture on the *Rāmāyaṇa* by Rt. Hon'ble Śrīnivāsa Śāstrī p. 362).

According to Vālmīki Sītā reiterates her position thus—"I am yours, truly, utterly and yet you discard me. Where is your moral courage gone."

Rāma consoles her saying—"Just as a good man who has conquered all his passions and thinks the whole world his family, cannot put aside his tenderness which has become an inseparable part of his nature, so are you to me" (*Ibid.* p. 370).

Again in *Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa* we find Rāma telling Bharata that the masters can use their wives or children as they please.

In the traditions or custom prevailing in that ancient society such sentiments were not inappropriate. Sītā therefore says that her banishment was not only right and proper for her Lord to clear himself of his slander concerning her (vide *The Ideal Man, Śrī Rāma* by Swāmī Siddhāntānanda p. 149).

In the *Mahābhārata* we find the husband pledging the wife and ultimately losing his country. The role of women in the epic shows that they had honourable place in society.

Manu himself has said that where women are honoured gods dwell or in other words where they are not honoured society will decay.

Rāmāyaṇa is ideal example of true relationship of man and woman.

To a woman the first protector is the husband, the second is the son, the third is the agnatic kinsmen; there is no fourth.

One episode in the *Rāmāyaṇa* draws our pointed attention and for that matter of all critics too. That is the abandonment of Sītā by Rāma to allay the suspicion of his people about her virtue while in Rāvaṇa's hands, where we find the monarch

subjugating his individual happiness (even when he is convinced of the purity of Sītā once at Lanka) to his idea of duty. Kingly duties here seem to intervene into the private life of the individual that holds the reigns of a country. Perhaps kingly duties and individual life come in conflict and public duties steal a march over the individual happiness. Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown. Even in this century have we not witnessed how king Edward VIII of England was forced to abdicate the throne for the sake of his own individual choice of a wife, not approved by the public. Vālmīki has crowned Rāma and Sītā with the perfection of human quality. Adversity teaches us one lesson and prosperity another. And yet in all these trials and tribulations Rāma and Sītā stood fast to their vow of unity loving each other. This is lesson to be well-dinted into the minds of modern couple or Rāma's and Sītā's who for very insignificant reason march from bedroom to court room.

Bhavabhūti and Kālidāsa—

To Bhavabhūti and Kālidāsa married love is not complete without the bliss of a child. A child is a thread that sews and preserves worldly existence. The child is unique tie of joy binding the inmost essence of the hearts of a father and mother. It is a creation when all the limbs and the total body flow out into affection and the two hearts are profoundly stirred and molten into a stream of delight. Hence a child is a true symbol of the union of the parents and express the acme of married life (*Bhavabhūti* by G. K. Bhaṭa p. 78).

Kālidāsa in *Kumārasambhavam Sarga* 4 verse 33 describes the duty of a wife thus—

शशिना सह याति कौमुदी सह मेघेन तडित् प्रलीयते।
प्रमदाः पतिवर्त्मगा इति प्रतिपन्नं हि विचेतनैरपि॥

"Moonlight follows the moon, lightening the cloud and women go the way of their husbands. (The wife who is a *Pativratā* wholly devoted to her husband goes the way of her husband). This is a recognised fact even among the insensate beings."

Vedic Concept of Hindu Marriage—

In *Ṛgveda* VI. 58 *Pūṣan* impelled by love, desirous of glory goes on an embassy to Sūryā. To Him, the love-impelled swift moving and strong, the *Devas* gave to Sūryā. Here the bridegroom is said to be 'given to' the bride, a point that establishes the dignified position of the woman. This romantic concept of love is maintained by stressing the mutualness of the love. As time passed Sūryā becomes a human bride. And 'giving' took the form of *Kanyādāna*, a gift of the *Kanyā* (one who has not attained puberty).

In *Ṛgveda* (X.85.36) the marriage vow taken by the couple is described thus—

"I take thy hand (in mine) for good fortune, that thou mayest live to old age with me, thy husband. Gods—Bhaga, Aryamā, Savitā, Purandhi, have given thee to me to be the mistress of my house."

This marriage vow has united couples in India for thousands of years. 'Being mistress of a home' came to imply the living of the ideal domestic life.

In (X.85.26) the *Veda* says—

"Let Pūṣan take thy hand and conduct thee hence. May the two Aśvins carry thee in their chariot, go to thy house so that thou mayest be the household's mistress a ruler (of the household) thou wilt address the assembly."

Thus the woman had an exalted position in her husband's house. In *Ṛgveda* (X.85.46) the couple jointly speak—

"May all *Devas* and *Āpas* unite our hearts, may Mātariśvā, Dhātā, Deṣṭri, all bind us close."

This is the closing *Mantra* of the hymn, that the love between the husband and the wife is mutual, and indicates conjugal unity.

The Vedic ideal of marriage is that of perfect monogamy, the lifelong companionship of two people. 'This practice must have been well-established, as is evident from the fact that the Vedic *Ṛṣi*, seeking comparisons for perfect duality for the twin

deities, Aśvins, gives alongwith the examples of two eyes, two lips etc., that of a married couple—"दंपतीव क्रतुविदा जनेषु" (*Ṛgveda* II. 39.2). Like the wise married couple among the people (*The Call of the Vedas* by A. C. Bose p. 259-260).

In *Mantra* (X. 85.42) it is said—"May you two dwell here; be not parted; enjoy the full span of life playing with the sons and with grandsons, rejoicing in your own home."

This is the wish that *Agni* entertains at the time when bride is given to the bridegroom, making *Agni* as witness.

Perfect harmony between the wife and the husband is what is desired by the marriage. Yājñavalkya in verse 74 states—"Where there is harmony between the husband and wife there the three *Vargas* prosper. "यत्र दम्पत्योरानुकूल्यम्" in the verse means where there is harmony between the husband and wife i. e., unity of heart, there of the *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kāma* is a daily increase. This can be accomplished by both the couple by mutual agreement.

In verse 82 Yājñavalkya states—"By the husband, brother, father, *Jñāti*, mother-in-law, father-in-law, husband's brother and the *Bandhus*' women should be honoured with ornaments, clothes and food. Manu also in (III. 56) says—"यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवता:" where women are honoured the gods dwell. It is not a case where the woman is treated as chattel; instead she is given the highest honour, whose entry into the house is taken as the harbinger of prosperity.

Again Yājñavalkya in verse 85 states—"When a maiden, the father should guard (her); when married, the husband; and in old age, the sons; in the absence of these, the *Jñātis*; never at anytime is independence for women." In the absence of all these the king is the supporter and master of women. As she has to depend on these, it is said that 'never anywhere is independence for women'. Manu's statement that no woman deserves independence only implies that at no time she remains without becoming a dependent. In the modern world women do not depend on their husbands for their daily needs when

they get employed. And yet the claim for maintenance is a remnant of the old concept of dependence.

At any rate conjugal bliss, through unity of mind and heart of the couple is what is attempted.

Observance of the husband's word is the wife's highest duty, says Yājñavalkya.

In India marriage is a sacrament having spiritual basis. The couple are expected to lead a life of self-restraint in the married estate. It is a life-long attachment not to be dissolved at will or fancy of the parties. When this sacred alliance is broken, society remains in a flux and social norms remain diluted. Sanctity of marriage is lost. A large scale divorce in a society indicates a lack of morality or standards in a society. Women have definite role to play in society. Woman is the mother of the race. If married life is religious duty, said Gāndhījī, motherhood must be so too; procreation of children has to be undertaken with a full sense of responsibility. Alexis Carrel says—

"Females, at any rate among mammals, seem only to attain their full development after one or more pregnancies.....Women who have no children are not so well-balanced and become more nervous than the others.......The importance to her of the generative function has not been sufficiently recognised. Such function is indispensable to her optimum development" (*Man the Unknown* cited in *Gāndhījī's View of Life* by Candraśaṅkara Śukla p. 184-185).

"Women shall be forever the womb and cradle but never the tomb." These are words put in the mouth of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

The *Ṛṣis* attempted a perfect reconciliation of the genuine interests of the couple. The perfectly ethical marriage is the monogamous one. The relation between Rāma and Sītā, Satyavān and Sāvitrī is idealized in the scriptures. Woman in *Hindu View* of Dr. S. Rādhākṛṣṇan describes the general Hindu view of life (at page 63) where he expounds the concept of *Hindu Dharma*.

Dharma is right action. He says—"It regards the woman as the helpmate of man in all his work, *Sahadharmiṇī*. The Hindu believes in the speciality of the contribution which woman makes to the world. She has special responsibilities and special duties. Even such an advanced thinker as Mr. Bertrand Russell allows that 'each class and sex has that to give to the common stock of achievement, knowledge and thought which it alone can give, and robs itself and the community by inferior imitation.' So long as children cannot be shaken from heaven, but have to be built within their mothers' bodies, so long will there be a specific function for women. As the bearing and rearing of children take a good deal of time and attention, women were relieved of the economic responsibilities for the family. While man is expected to take to the worldly pursuits (*Yajña Prādhānya*), woman is capable of great heights of self-control and self-denial (*Tapaḥprādhānya*). The stricter code of morality applied to women is really a complement to them, for it accepts the natural superiority of the women. But the modern woman, if I may say so is losing her self-respect. She does not respect her own individuality and uniqueness, but is paying an unconscious tribute to man by trying to imitate him. She is fast becoming masculine and mechanical. Adventurous pursuits are leading her into conflict with her own inner nature."

Bṛhadāraṇyaka in (I.4.3) states that Prajāpati, feeling unhappy for being alone, desired a mate. He became of the size of a man and wife embracing each other. He divided this very body into two. From that husband and wife came into being. Therefore this body of man is one half of himself, like half of a two-celled seed. Thus these two complementaries are together striving forward to their spiritual end taking part equally in all work religious as well as secular. But later on the women were relieved of their economic responsibility, which became the duty of man, but all the same the two together partaking equally in religious matters. The existence of a wife became a necessity in all

religious performances. Hence we find in the *Rāmāyaṇa* that Rāma could not perform the *Yāga* without the help of Sītā. He therefore created a statue of Sītā and kept it by his side.

Eleanor Morton in *Women Behind Mahātmā Gāndhī* (at page 16) describes the life in a joint family. She writes—"In the busy life of the great joint household—occupied in work, prayer and with kinspeople, friends—the eldest woman, the mother, was supreme. She supervised the servants, decided what food should be cooked and how much; to her were responsible all the small children, the daughters-in-law, the daughters not married. Although unable to read, she taught the youngsters their prayers and from the teaching she herself had long ago received, she gave reverent recital of what she could remember of the legends and myths of ancient gods and heroes. This she did as a task laid upon her by the father of the house." This is true of all joint families of yore. Strict adherence to the command of the husband is the duty, a prime duty of the wife. She had to obtain her salvation through service of her husband.

Indian Ideal Womanhood—

The modern Indian woman has as large a legacy as man, in all the thought and knowledge that formed the peculiar gift of the modern age to India. They cannot throw away that historic experience and to extricate from it, except to their own peril. Sītā, Sāvitrī, Damayantī and a glorious array of women are still their ideals. Swāmī Vivekānanda said—"Any attempt to modernise our women, if it tries to take our women away from the ideal of Sītā, is immediately a failure, as we see everyday. The women of India must grow and develop in the footprints of Sītā, and that is the only way" (*Complete Works of Swāmī Vivekānanda* Vol. III. p. 256, 8th Ed.). "Modern Indian women are in search of an adaptation of the ancient spiritual values to the vastly expanded modern conditions and opportunities of life and work" says Swāmī Raṅganāthānanda (*Eternal Values for a changing Society* Vol.II. p. 160).

Even today a large number of Indian women would like to remain as good housewives, caring and tending their children and thereby fulfilling their natural urge for motherhood, a spiritual transformation of wifehood. "And India's spiritual heritage today gently whispers to every woman, as also to every man, to utilise the marriage context to achieve the increasing liberation of the tremendous value of the *Ātmā*, the sexless Self, behind man and woman....If woman as wife is socially significant woman as mother is spiritually glorious. If the spiritual is no more than coterminous with the biological, then woman as mother of a little genetic group would have remained the highest possible moral and spiritual development for her sex. But *Vedānta* sees the spiritual as transcending the merely genetic and the biological, and even the social, and finding expression in an ideal of motherhood, where love and service break the barriers of family, race and creed and assume a universal aspect. It is this spiritual elevation in self-transcendence that enables woman, even as wife, to function effectively as a citizen of a free socio-political order, embracing with her mother-heart the millions of its body politic. If this is called finding life—larger and fuller life—then the path to it lies through self-development by self-effacement. That is what a woman does when she grows from wifehood to motherhood. In this no human value is neglected or negated, but there is only a growth from a smaller to larger personality, and a progressive manifestation of the inherent divinity" (*Ibid*. p. 158-159).

In *Devī Māhātmya* in *Adhyāya* 11, verse 5, it is said—"स्त्रियः समस्ताः सकला जगत्सु" all women are but your forms. Again *Adhyāya* 5 verse 31, extols the *Devī* as "मातृ रूपेण संस्थिता", You exist in every being in the form of a mother. Such is the glory of woman, as wife and mother. To young girl married and brought newly into a house, the home becomes a pilgrimage which takes her to the ultimate end of peace and to the land of bliss. Wifehood and motherhood is a *Sādhanā* to her that helps her inner growth from a mere biological being into a divine being;

a full flowering of her personality from material to spiritual dimensions. In this process she is as much entitled to as her husband, but without resort to any solitude of caves or inhospitable forests or of a life of a recluse. In the *Rāmāyaṇa* Sītā says that a husband is not only a wife's deity, but also a refuge.

In a foreword to a book *From Darkness to Light* depicting the life of Ramā Bāī, described therein as Divine Mother, and written by Mrs. T. N. K. Nāyar, Sir C. P. Rāmaswāmī Iyer, one of the greatest sons of India, who had reached giddy heights, writes—"She (the Divine Mother) fulfilled the laws of her being and the dictates of tradition and we have in this book a vivid account of her married life during which she came to the realization of the absence of all conflicts between the duty to the home and the duty to the inner life and its demands."

Mrs. Nāyar, a great devotee of the Mother describes how Mother's chosen deity, Śrī Rāma became identified with her own husband. She writes—"She (Divine Mother) was an ever devoted wife, a *Mahāpativratā* established in *Swadharma* to the utmost. For Her from the time of Her wedding, Śrī Rāma, her chosen deity, became identified with her husband. For Her the husband's word was unquestionable law, and to serve him the highest propitiation and *Upāsanā*. In this manner even while serving Her Husband, she was releasing tremendous energy for worldly uplift through Her husband, who underwent a radical change and became a self-realized *Yogī*. In later years he was known as Bhagavān, among mother's devotees ....." (p. 152).

The Divine Mother's life portrays the unequalled glory of Indian womanhood. Love is a power and a tower of strength. For, the husband to a woman and a wedded wife to a man it symbolises in mutual relation the dearest friend, sum-total of all relatives, the fulfilment of all desires, a priceless treasure, in fact the life itself. Love transmutes the two souls and fuses them into one—one mind and one heart. This is the nature of

love when two souls are brought together as if by a Divine Ordinance. To the Divine Mother love transcended all physical barriers and material aspirations to become highly spiritual.

The Glory of Mother in Indian Culture—

Motherhood is the highest reach of womanhood. To a Hindu even the God is revealed as the Mother of all creation. The *Lalitā Sahasranāma* begins with addressing the Goddess as 'Śrī Mātā' and so *Devī Māhātmya*. "A people and a philosophy that has educated itself to look upon God as Mother has also learnt to invest its view of women with the utmost tenderness and reverence. The very hoary culture of the Hindu trains him to look upon all women, nay, to look upon all the female of all species, as forms of one Divine Mother. In the words of the *Manusmṛti* (II. 145)—

उपाध्यायान्दशाचार्य आचार्याणां शतं पिता।
सहस्त्रं तु पितृन्माता गौरवेणातिरिच्यते॥

"From the point of view of reverence due, a teacher is tenfold superior to a mere lecturer, a father a hundredfold to a teacher, and a mother a thousandfold to a father."

"And what constitutes the abundant glory in the mother is her self-effacing love and compassion which, to the Hindu, is the mark of high spirituality and true culture. And men in general and women in particular have the privilege to attain to this high spirituality and true culture by growing beyond the limitations of mere sex, even while living and functioning at that level in all dignity and freedom. It is this vision that India has always held up before all men and women, and which her women, more than her men, have passionately struggled to realize in their lives" (*Eternal Values for a Changing Society* by Swāmī Raṅganāthānanda Vol. II. p. 159-160).

The *Upaniṣads* recommend the basic requirement of our culture "मातृदेवो भव, पितृदेवो भव, आचार्यदेवो भव". And when the great Śaṅkara sang—"माता च पार्वती देवी पिता देवो महेश्वरः", he not only attributed divinity to the earthly mother and father, but also

made the high Gods from heaven to descend into the form of mother and father, who are visible realities of the unknown. Śaṅkara gave precedence to mother over father, in true sense of the *Upaniṣad. Padma Purāṇa says—*

सर्वतीर्थमयी माता सर्वदेवमयः पिता।
मातरं पितरं तस्मात् सर्वयत्नेन पूजयेत्॥

"Mother is the embodiment of all the *Tīrthas* or sacred waters. Father is the living God on earth. They should be worshipped by their children with greatest effort (even if that is necessary) with sincerity, love and devotion, even as a *Bhakta* would worship his chosen deity.

Rāmāyaṇa describes the mother as a 'living God' and says that if a son were to slight his mother and seek the blessings from others, it would be purposeless. The paradise is at the holy feet of the mother. The scriptures lay the greatest emphasis on the duty of the children to honour the mother. God will not take it kindly to those who fail to fulfil their sacred duties towards the parents. A son who fails or forgets to carry out his promise to a mother is not a son at all, says Śaṅkara.

Modern India; Married Relationship—

"But when women form the habit of valuing things for themselves, then they may be expected furiously to storm your mind, to decoy your soul from her love-tryst of the eternal and to make you to smother the voice of the infinite by the unmeaning rattle of ceaseless movement" observed Tagore in *Personality* (p. 176). With the growth of science, civilization has been growing increasingly masculine, so that the full reality of the individual is more and more ignored, adds Tagore (*Ibid*. p. 179). Impatience and egotism frequently break off a union that promises well, because the two people concerned are not able to live the open common life which might weld them into harmony, so says Dora Russell at p. 111 of her book (*The Right to be Happy*).

In the ancient days, the new entrant into the joint family consisting of large number of members, had the distinct

advantage of getting advice as and when required. The experience of the old people was a guide to them. Any differences between the couple would be solved in the sweet and lovelorn atmosphere of the bedroom, by them. They were not participants in the economic life of the family. But today with the disappearance of the joint family, the young couple remain without any assistance or advice from their seniors. The family today has gone nucleal with a couple hardly having any experience in life. Parents are neglected and they are not sought for any advice. Today the young educated man born and bred up in the glare of modern civilization, unburdened by any sense of past history and tradition, imagines the future with the mind of a visionary, and the old man sees the future by looking backwards, not necessarily from this time but from some future moment that he might arbitrarily choose. For the imagination he would substitute experience and for the awe of the future he would substitute acceptance of the past. Perceptions thus differ and consequences follow.

With the increasing cost of living, modern woman also is by necessity forced to leave the seclusion of the home and come out in the open seeking employment in order to balance the family budget. And in this she is forced to pay its price. She has to become more a male loosing much of her femininity.

When the primary gifts of nature to a woman are lost or breached the natural rule remains transgressed causing at times volcanic eruption in marital life or in society which may sometimes assume national proportions.

We find in recent times a large scale recurrence of matrimonial rifts, emerging from the bedrooms to courtrooms, according to a Judge (a woman) of a matrimonial court. She observes in one of her judgments in a recent divorce case thus—"Marriage has ceased to be made in heaven....Marriages crash even before the euphoria of the honeymoon wanes. And even as petitioner seeks a separation as a prelude to divorce,

they are contemplating another tryst with matrimony." About divorce the Judge observes...."divorce has shed its social stigma and has ceased to socially isolate the divorce who can now remarry with impunity." Mark the word 'impunity' that borders on 'irresponsibility.' If marriages are such that they can be broken up without any moral and social compunction, it indicates a fall of standards set for a male or a female by the Indian scriptures and Indian tradition. Dowry deaths are not uncommon today. Mammon has displaced religion but is also junking history and robs it of its tradition.

The learned family court Judge analyses the cause of a large scale divorces. She says—"Affluence, education, employment of women, and the top rung focus, a fall out of competitive educational culture promoted by the new generation parents have all served to evolve a genure of self-oriented young men and women, resistant to adjustments, compromises or tolerance all essential matrimonial corner stones."

"Boys and girls today are like hot-house plants sheltered, dependent to unexposed stress, programmed to compete and be winners and achievers. They are selfish, self-focussed, carrier ambitious and incapable of adjustments. Tolerance is a casualty" (Vide: *Indian Express*, 13th January 1995).

The learned Judge further observes that this incompatibility and inability to adjust was taken care of in former times and how it was being done then. She continues—

"Earlier house-keeping was a gender legacy. A newly married girl well-trained in assuming the housewifely role by her mother automatically assumed domestic reins after marriage." She refuses to genuflect before existing male precepts" (*Ibid.*). The constant complaint from the couch is that the woman does not know how to manage the kitchen.

Modern education and civilization has been growing increasingly masculine and ignoring the person behind, the individual. In its inordinate lust for power, it has robbed woman

the most part of her world and the home is everyday being crowded out by the office.

There are several stories in our great classics, where we see women showing great valour and moral strength. They say in brief—

"Give us good women, we will have a great civilization
Give us good mothers we will have a great nation."
(Vide: *True Knowledge* by Dr. S. Rādhākṛṣṇan p. 88)

As the Empress (*Sāmrājñī*) she rules the home not with any brute authority but by the sacrifice that love involves, the joy that love radiates and the peace that love imparts. The basic requirement of our culture is imparted here; "मातृदेवो भव, पितृदेवो भव, आचार्यदेवो भव".

"Home is a temple where the family members each of whom is a moving temple, nurtured and nourished. Mother is the high priest of this house of God. Humility is the incense with which the house is filled. Reverance is the lamp that is lit with love as oil" (Sāī Bābā).

Women, mothers of the race, inheritors of a great philosophy, culture, custom and tradition, embodiments of compassion, love and sacrifice—these are the gifts of God to you, so that 'heaven might grow on mortal soil.'

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In the West, the woman is wife. The idea of womanhood is concentrated there—as the wife. To the ordinary man in India, the whole force of womanhood is concentrated in motherhood. In the Western home, the wife rules. In an Indian home, the mother rules. If a mother comes into a Western home, she has to be subordinate to the wife; to the wife belongs the home. A mother always lives in our homes : the wife must be subordinate to her. See all the difference of ideas.

—*Swami Vivekananda*

A Living God

—D. S. Bajpai

In the ideal Hindu view of married life, a husband is a living God to his wife. The nuptial bond is not contractual; it is to be a life-long committment sanctified by vows taken with god fire as witness. It even looks forward for union beyond life after life. Their lives get inextricably blended. No religious ceremony could be complete without both of them performing the rites jointly. Broadly speaking, the more virile male traditionally worked outsides home, provided for her necessities and gave a meaning to her womanhood. He protected her life and honour. It was enjoined upon him to consider his wife as Goddess Lakṣmī, an emblem of prosperity, treat her with respect and maintain her dignity. He had to be strictly faithful to her. The wife not only ran the household, did domestic duties, reared children but also enlivened and entertained her husband and by so doing, took away all his worries and weariness.* She was a tower of strength to her husband in hours of distress.† Loyalty, service, accommodation and self-sacrifice were to be her chief qualities. Of all her qualities, chastity and fidelity to her husband were counted as uppermost. So great was the spiritual force of this chastity that she acquired even supernatural powers and could, like Sāvitrī, bring back to life her dead husband. Tulasīdāsa, in his *Rāmāyaṇa*, has put in the mouth of Anasūyā, the traits of an ideal wife in her discourse with Sītā. For a wife, worshipping her husband and being dedicated to him in

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* कान्तेव चाभिरमयत्यपनीय खेदम्।

† धीरज धर्म मित्र अरु नारी। आपति काल परखिये चारी॥

body, word and mind, was all her *Dharma* beyond which she needed no other *Pūjā* or fasting etc. The chaste wife saw in her husband the only male in the world and no other person, even in dreams.*

All this worked well so long as both the partners in the journey of life remained faithful to their duties. The idolatrous piety of a Hindu wife had at least something to go by. The grand spectacle of her dedication, self sacrifice and suffering created an aweful respect for her. Even her burning herself on the funeral pyre of her dead husband was edifying, not depressing. The fault must be laid at the head of the male who, by virtue of his position as bread earner and worker outside home started creating cracks in this well-cemented bond. He began to be dominating and overbearing, unjust and unkind in his dealings with his wife. The stress and illiberal cares of his duties outside home made him irritated. Predatory wolf as he is, he began seeking carnal pleasures elsewhere or even taking for himself more than one wives. In the kingly world of power and affluence, it became a custom to have many queens and a defeated king was invariably to marry his daughter to the victor as a sign of subjugation. The wife desisted from the path of sinning for fear of divine wrath. It was only in rare cases that she faltered and fell. She silently bore the cross of child widowhood, forced *Satī*, divorce and, in modern times, of being burnt for dowry.

Unfortunately, the women's Liberation Movement under the impact of Western civilization, was conceived more in the spirit of an angry hostility to male, a contempt for him born out of cheated womanhood, than in the spirit of social reform for ameliorating the lot of the suffering women. Economic independance and freedom from the responsibilities of motherhood,

* एकइ धर्म एक ब्रत नेमा। कायँ बचन मन पति पद प्रेमा॥
उत्तम के अस बस मन माहीं। सपनेहुँ आन पुरुष जग नाहीं॥

in the words of Dr. Rādhākṛṣṇan, became the dream of a girl of the smart set. Looseness began to be commended and practised. The protagonists of the Movement decided to wash dirt with dirt and flaunt at the face of the male sex promiscuity, even among married women. In the bargain, the predatory wolf got wider field for hunting and was twice blessed ! The result of all this separatist sexual programme has been that life-long committment of a married life is today confronted by a culture 'propagating a sensuality of immediate gratification.' Divorce is on the increase, the estranged couple rushing to divorce, little realizing that the divorce laws are there not to facilitate separation but to avoid it. It is a gift of the enduring Hindu culture that millions and millions of unsophisticated Hindu women have felt disinterested in profitting by gains of such a liberation movement in spite of their being victims of male injustice. It has been rightly said that there is no place for ego in married life. An emmense majority of wives, specially in the country side, are not lured by modern slogans of individual self-assertion or projecting their own personality.

A silent social revolution has, however, been going on, which has benefitted husband-wife relationship. Women are being increasingly educated and enlightened. A spirit of rational critical enquiry is replacing blind orthodoxy which made them deify their husbands. This had, no doubt, eroded to some extent, the concept of a husband being a living God. Even so, an average Hindu wife is today happily placed in relationship with her husband. Wives in the remotest village have learnt to give up their slovenly way of living and dressing and be more presentable to their husbands. In joint families, removal of purdah and other barriers in the way of meeting their husbands at will have brought them nearer their husbands. Joint families are fast breaking up and single family system is on the way. The terrifying mother-in-law has become a thing of the past. A husband no longer abuses or beats his wife at the instance

of his mother or father. Every husband who leaves his home on employment in cities howsoever low his income be, takes his wife alongwith him. Gone are the days when husbands left for distant cities to earn livelihood leaving their wives and returning after one or two years. Men have learnt to share with their wives their domestic work, even rearing children. They have willingly accepted the role of their wives as working women. A thousand rills of small social changes are thus filling the broad genial current of married life. Hindu wives in general still worship their husbands with all their faults on their head and fast and pray for their long life and continuity of their relationship with their husbands. Her highest aspiration is to die during the life of her husband with her *Suhāga* intact.

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अतिहासातिरोषौ च क्रोधस्थानं च वर्जये।
निरताहं सदा सत्ये भर्तॄणामुपसेवने॥
सर्वथा भर्तृरहितं न ममेष्टं कथंचन।
यदा प्रवसते भर्ता कुटुम्बार्थेन केनचित्॥
सुमनोवर्णकापेता भवामि व्रतचारिणी।

"I do not have any conversation with crooked persons, never permit any idea of discontent in me and keep myself away from the cavillation. Neither do I laugh much nor show much anger. I always avoid occasions for anger. I always speak the truth and keep always busy in serving my husbands. I dislike to remain away from them. Whenever my husbands, for any purpose go to some other country or place, those days I do not use any cosmetics or flowery ornaments and observe strictly the rules of celibacy (*Brahmacarya*)."

—*Mahābhārata, Vana Parva* (233. 29-30½)

Paean for the Indomitable Divine

—Dr. V. V. B. Rama Rao

The glorious paean singing the power and the glory of the Supreme Being as *Devī Māhātmya* in *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* is said to be a song that showers the blessings of the Mother. The paean occurs in the section *Uttama Caritram* in the V canto in the colloquy. The *Ṛṣi* narrates how the angels sang the praise of the Supreme Mother to propitiate her and invoke Her aid to kill the formidable demons Śumbha and Niśumbha who snatched away the suzerainty of Indra and the portions of the fruit of the *Yajñas* that should rightly go to him. The following is an attempt at English rendering.

Salutations to Thee! The Supreme Deity,
Mother ever benevolent!
Salutations! Protectress,
Ever would I offer Thee salutations!
The everlasting with red radiance,
The enraged, the all-bearing, salutations!
Moonlight and the moon formed,
One evergiving joy and comfort, salutations!
The mother staying south east ward,
Deity of wealth and learning, salutations!
Perennial Mother Durgā, the essence of all
Reason and doer of all, salutations!
That renowned Mother, the one ever-doing good;
Salutations to Thee!
That renowned Mother, the most enraged
And the most kindly salutations!

That renowned Mother who founded the universe,
Divine consort and doer of good, salutations!
That Supreme Deity, Mother
Creator of the enchantment of the Lord, salutations!
That Mother of beings all,
Giver of awareness to all, salutations!
That Supreme Deity, the Mother,
As life and awareness in all beings seated, salutations!
That Supreme Deity in the form of all beings seated, salutations!
That Supreme Deity in the form of hunger in all beings seated, Salutations!
That Supreme Deity in the form of shadow in all beings seated, salutations!
That Supreme Deity in the form of energy in all beings seated, salutations!
That Supreme Deity in the form of thirst in all beings seated, salutations!
The Supreme Deity in the form of forgiveness in all beings seated, salutations!
The Supreme Deity in the form of birth-quality in all beings seated, salutations!
The Supreme Deity in the form of hesitation in all beings seated, salutations!
The Supreme Deity in the form of peace in all beings seated, salutations!
That Supreme Deity in the form of attention in all beings seated, Salutations!
That Supreme Deity in the form of radiance in all beings seated, salutations!
That Supreme Deity in the form of affluence in all beings seated, salutations!
That Supreme Deity in the form of temper in all beings seated, salutations!

The Supreme Deity in the form of remembrance in all beings seated, salutations!
That Supreme Deity in the form of compassion in all beings seated, salutations!
That Supreme Deity in the form of satiety in all beings seated, salutations!
That Supreme Deity in the form of mother in all beings seated, salutations!
That Supreme Deity in the form of illusion in all beings seated, salutations!
That Supreme Deity in the senses of all beings, everywhere
That Supreme Deity, the Mother permeating all beings, always
That Supreme Deity in the form of permeating all creation,
Salutations to Thee! Salutations to Thee! Salutations to Thee!

Worship of the desired deity is the best vow (in honour) of Hari. Without jealousy she should also offer water and *Piṇḍa* to her husband. The chaste woman will be suddenly united with her husband in the heaven of Viṣṇu; (and will live with him there) for crores of thousands of ages and crores of hundreds of ages.

From there the *Brāhmaṇa* woman will come out, after having received a great vow. She would emancipate thousands and hundreds (of members) of both the families (i.e., her father's family and her husband's family). Therefore, relatives, sons, brothers etc., should never curb (her) and should not make her lose her vow.

—*Padma Purāṇa, Sṛṣṭi Khaṇḍa* (52.75b—79a)

It is marriage which is based on spiritual union, which takes no account of the colour of the face, or the beauty of countenance or form, but sees the divinity within, that is the only safe and abiding one. That only can bring happiness and joy.

—*Swami Rama Tirtha*

The Pitiable Plight of Women in Modern Age

—Romika Batra

There is much hue and cry regarding the existing status of woman all over the world today. In our daily newspapers we usually come across so many pieces of news about the discussions and heated arguments that crop up during various seminars and conferences held in various parts of the world in an effort to resolve the question mark regarding the plight of women in modern age. Bills are passed by the Governments for the upliftment of women and to ensure them of their sights. One can nowadays see a separate page specially devoted to the problems of women in the leading newspapers. Why all this noise? This movement throughout the world does throw light on one thing mainly—the dissatisfaction of women. After all, there can be no rain without clouds. This turmoil in a way is voicing the pitiable condition women find themselves in.

The modern age is undoubtedly laudable for its contribution in upholding and promoting certain positive traits like scientific attitude, exploration of innovative ideas, material progress, scientific and technical advancement, facilities, its focus on free-will and individuality etc. But a close scrutiny reveals that this is only one side of the picture, only a half truth. For if we see the plight of women, we find that there has been no significant change in her predicament.

It may be admitted without dispute that no other religion has attributed such a high and esteemed pedestal to woman as our Hindu religion. It lays down emphatically—"यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवता:" or in other words a society or a country where

women are given their due share of respect blooms with prosperity and happiness. She is addressed with such adjectives as Mother, '*Annapūrṇā*' and *Śakti* in our epics, thus indicating the raised facets of a woman's self as mother, provider and finally as promotor of spirituality. In her role as a wife, she is called *Ardhāṅginī*—i. e., man's equal, his moral, emotional and spiritual counterpart. Nowhere is she referred to as inferior or weaker. We have therefore every reason to feel proud of our rich cultural heritage.

An earnest survey of the predicament of woman in the modern age, however, reflexes just the contrary. Our present day society is ailing from paradoxes and double standards, where far from being an *Annapūrṇā* or a *Śakti*, woman is maltreated, is stripped off her previous dignity and is considered an inferior and weaker being. One main reason for this state of affairs regarding the predicament of women is the misinterpretation of our religion and culture. For example, Manu in *Manusmṛti* has said—

पिता रक्षति कौमारे भर्ता रक्षति यौवने।
रक्षन्ति स्थविरे पुत्रा न स्त्री स्वातन्त्र्यमर्हति॥

In other words, in her younger years a woman is escorted by her father. After marriage she is escorted by her husband, and in old age by her sons. Woman can't live separate from these men at any stage of her life. The above statement is misjudged as an effort to snatch from a woman her basic right of freedom. However seen from an earnest perspective the statement vibrates the undertones that woman is seen in connection with man in the form of father, husband and sons in all the phases of her life. She can't be viewed in isolation. The statement also states the reverse i.e., man can't exist if isolated from woman. Manu has just set the orbits in which a woman and a man should function in order to safeguard cultural chaos for the coming generations. Nevertheless the choice of controversial words by Manu to express the right idea

in the above cliche has caused much misnomer with the result that woman has undergone a long history of being exploited, tortured, maltreated and even man-handled by man. These atrocities have increased manifold in our so-called modern times. Woman is expected to adjust herself the position subservient to man. She has to be his subordinate, not his equal. She is admired for her qualities like endurance, patience, dignity, grace, beauty, sacrifice, silent sufferings etc., which are unquestionably associated with women. She is unaccepted to man as a warrior, a fighter or as an intellectual partner. Though there is no denying the fact that these qualities are necessary for the upliftment of life, but in the case of women, these so-called, ideal traits have been glorified to such an extent that woman has got buried under their weight. The pertinent question that troubles the mind is : Why are these 'ideal' quality traits not as much emphasised in the case of men as they are in the case of women? Has the integrity, solidarity and sincerity of man ever been so minutely and strictly questioned? Remarkably, in our society a girl is educated from the very childhood to bear sufferings silently. She in a way is manipulated by man in such a way that she accepted herself in a subservient position. Equality is often denied to her.

The atrocities and violence regarding women are increasing day-by-day. More and more cells and commissions are formed which can look into the problems of women, and find agreeable solution to them. What do they indicate? Simply the plight of women which is becoming pathetic day-by-day. In 1985 CAWC (Crime Against Women Cell) was formed and from the time of its setting, the number of complaints has increased tenfold. The increase in the number of cases reported, is a clear indicator of the societal degeneration of the attitude towards women. An astonishing thing that has come up in the cases registered in these cells is that earlier the cases of violence were related only to lower classes, the *Jhuggi* (*Jhopaḍī*) living. But today

Man not willing to share power with women - keep her uneducated

there are so-called respectable, very culture-conscious, highly literate (can't be called educated) gentlemen who indulge in such heinous activities and thrust all their complexities on their wives. This shows that the violence on women is increasing day-by-day though the methods adopted are different.

In the modern times, the financial stress, especially the middle class families, which constitute the largest chunk in any country, has increased immensely. As it is difficult to manage the household expenditure with only husband's income, woman is compelled to seek job for herself outside her home in order to assist family income. This has only worsened woman's plight. For, the responsibility on her shoulders is now double. After returning from office, the tired woman has to do all the household chores, like a full time housewife. Husbands in a majority of cases, rarely help their wives as they are but the products of male chauvinist society where kitchen is considered to be a woman's domain. What is it if not cruelty and injustice with a woman who, equally tired, is offered no helping hand.

Seen from a psychological perspective, one finds that apart from the financial stresses of the modern age, another prominent reason which has compelled the educated urban woman to slip out of the four walls of the house in search of suitable job for herself is an effort to assert her individuality, to prove her worth. It is a kind of natural self-expression which was earlier stifled. It is a legitimate expression of her creativity.

Lack of education is another factor instrumental for the plight of woman. Until recent past woman was deprived of the right of education and was restricted to home only. Education has always remained a prerogative of man. Reason is obvious: Knowledge is a key to power and man was unwilling to share this power with woman, hesitant of making her an equal. Even today, the condition in rural areas is all the more same. There, the education of a girl is considered useless and it is argued that a girl has to look after her home and children after marriage.

So what has she to do with education? The urban areas and metropolitans have, however, experienced a wave of change where women are working as doctors, engineers, teachers and assistants and even pilots. But in metropolitan cities too women face a dualistic kind of situation where on the one hand education equips them with awareness and on the other hand the society they live in is still orthodox and has a rigid attitude. But on the whole the condition in urban areas is far better than that of the rural areas where taboos still operate at the grassroot level. The birth of a daughter is still unwelcome and considered inauspicious. A girl child is accepted with a heavy heart in these locations.

Some customs like dowry-system which have a strong hold on society, prove that woman is at a receiving end. In many cases the in-laws harass their daughters-in-law on not getting the expected dowry from their parents. Unable to cope with the pressures many girls commit suicide or in some cases are killed by her in-laws. This is the existing truth of the modern age and proves that woman is considered as a weaker being by the society. She is a liability, not an asset. Famous National Poet Maithilī Śaraṇa Gupta has expressed this reality very beautifully—

अबला जीवन हाय तुम्हारी यही कहानी।
आँचल में है दूध और आँखों में पानी॥

In other words, the poet says—"O helpless woman, this is the whole story of your life that you have got milk in your breasts and tears in your eyes."

To take into account another aspect of this problem let us move on to temples, *Gurudwārās* and other religious institutions. It is generally observed that women outnumber men at these places. Our religion instructs the women—

नास्ति स्त्रीणां पृथग्यज्ञो न व्रतं नाप्युपोषितम्।
पतिं शुश्रूषते येन तेन स्वर्गे महीयते॥

In other words, women need not do fasting or *Yajña* separately. Only by serving their husband properly they can attain *Mokṣa*.

Though the religious intentions and faith in God regarding these women can't be challenged but one is compelled to ask: Is their coming to temple is stimulated by just religious fervour or is it something more than that? For many women the temple is much more than a temple. It serves the purpose of social gatherings and is a meeting place. This is confirmed by the fact how these women can be seen indulging in gossips about their children, husband, neighbours and sundry issues. At a deeper level, it can be seen that the satisfaction these women fail to find from their husband and children, they hope to get by turning to God. Certain psychological reasons like boredom, monotony, depression etc., are also related with the problem. In such a situation woman has to turn to temple only as it serves as a means of outlet for their pent up feelings. Temples are more frequented than most other public places as it is a safe and legitimate place as all other outlets are barred for women.

The increasing tendency of suicide, depression, stress, sadness and tension among women go a long way to comment on their predicament. But there is no need for pessimism. After a long time of neglect and subjugation, woman ultimately has now realised her worth. She has proven herself as a *Śakti* a storehouse of immense power and strength. She refuses to be considered as an object for fulfilling the desires of man. What is needed today is just a slight change in attitude towards women, just to take her as a human being first and a woman later, to view her as a counterpart, not as a subordinate. In fact man and woman are like two wheels of a chariot. Both wheels must be sound for making the chariot i.e., our society healthy and modern in the real sense of term.

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Mother—the Best Preceptor

—A. N. Soorma

Mother is an architect of the child. She can mould him in any way she likes so that the child could tread a proper track in his life. Child is not born with social skills, which include talking, the proper way of eating, dressing, the way to behave normally in different settings etc. They have to be learnt by him from everyone. Socialisation is an informal procedure of instructions for such social norms. It thus differs from education which is a normal method of instructions. Thus a child is socialised by the parents, relatives and all others he comes in contact with. This is a lifelong way of learning about social world. This is because a human being never ceases to learn about social customs, habits, life ways etc. The young child learns great deal from his parents and friends in general and from his mother in particular as from the very infancy the child, mostly remains with his mother and thus picks up the impressions cast on him from her day-to-day activities. As such the responsibility of the mother increases with the growth of the child for improvement of his habits, physical, mental and spiritual developments. The mother teaches the child to become a responsible matured person. She makes the child aware as how to behave in different situations. She also teaches the child to grow up into a law-abiding citizen. Like the foundation of a building, if laid with good quality material, will take the load of a multistorey apartment, otherwise it will fall down if not constructed in accordance with the standard specifications. Similarly, proper and timely teachings, if imparted to the child,

will be very much effective. If a child keeps the company of bandits or criminals he will learn the criminal behaviour. Thus the mother remains vigilent and prevents the child from such unlawful activities, in case he so commits; so that the child is not spoiled, but moves in a good society.

There is an old but a good lesson-giving story that a child had fallen into the trap of bad elements and started committing crimes, which he used to disclose to his mother, who never raised any objection. Once he was caught red-handed while picking somebody's pocket and accordingly was sentenced to imprisonment on this charge. His mother was present in the court when this verdict was passed by the magistrate. On hearing this judgment, he immediately ran towards his mother and cut both of her ears with his teeth. When asked about this action, he told that his mother did not take any notice of these misdeeds as and when he had been telling her about his crimes. As such, mother plays a very important and prominent role in building the future of her child.

By nature, mothers are very kind at heart, affectionate and love their children very much but at times become very furious and punish their children also, in case they (children) are found not keeping a good society and are slipping away from the path of truth and righteousness. The nature and behaviour of the women have clearly been depicted and demonstrated physically in various poses in the idols of the female deities viz., Durgā Mātā, Kālī Mātā with many hands. In some hands they are holding different types of implements and weapons required to be used, against the miscreants, in order to suppress their social evils and the holding of lotus flowers, conch etc., in other hands symbolize their kindness and love for their devotees as well. Accordingly, the mothers adopt suitable ways and means, while taking into consideration the prevailing situation, to restrain their children from sinful actions and simultaneously encourage them also to follow the good path prescribed in the scriptures

while blessing them, so that they earn a good name and fame in the society and ultimately attain salvation.

The surrounding situations also leave impressions on the child through his mother during the pregnancy period. Once an American lady gave birth to a child whose features were resembling with a Negro. The family became suspicious. So they decided to consult some psychologist, who after a careful study and taking into consideration the various aspects came to the conclusion that as the lady had occasionally been looking on the picture of a Negro, which was hanging on the wall of her bedroom, is the main cause for this change, when she was in family way. There is another similar story which shows that the child assimilates the teachings, if imparted to his mother when the child is in his mother's womb. It is said that when Abhimanyu was to be born, Arjuna, once started describing the design of the *Cakravyūha* (Battle Array) to Subhadrā. She learnt upto the way of entrance to the *Cakravyūha* but fell asleep afterwards and could not listen the way to exit, due to which he (Abhimanyu) did enter the *Cakravyūha*, formed by the *Kauravas* in the great war of *Mahābhārata* but could not get out of the same with the result that he was captured and killed therein, being unaware of the passage to exit.

This is an established fact and the psychology supports this conviction that the impressions so accumulated by the expecting mother through any source, do cast an effect which is ultimately absorbed by the child. It is a general view that most of the children of the present era are very impertinent and behave in indisciplined manners as much as that they neither pay any regard to the elders, nor to their parents even and indulge in many undesirable activities, though they are very smart and intelligent as compared with the children of 3-4 decades past. The main reason behind this type of the children is that during the pregnancy, the ladies pass their time in viewing unsocial pictures, read novels and other such allied literature which are

very harmful for good society. These pollute their minds and the children so born in such unhealthy atmosphere create problems in the society.

Guru Govinda Siṁhajī's mother wanted to make her son a good warrior in order to fight against the excesses being done by the Turks, who were a source of panic and terror to the Hindus, as Auraṅgazeba was forcing them to accept Islāma or face death. As such *Mātā* Gujrījī, the mother of *Gurujī*, trained her son in horse-riding as well as in the ways of fighting with various types of weapons that are used in a battlefield. She had also been forming groups of the children, to train her son as how to fight against the enemy. There is another very famous story in this connection of queen Madālasā who converted her sons into Gyānīs. Madālasā was a very learned woman. She used to sing divine song (लोरी)—

शुद्धोऽसि बुद्धोऽसि निरंजनोऽसि संसारमायापरिवर्जितोऽसि।
संसार स्वप्नं त्यज मोहनिद्रां मदालसा वाक्यमुवाच पुत्रम्॥

While she was rocking the cradle of her children, they imbibed with the milk of the mother, the Vedantic teachings also and became sages in due course of time. But on the advice of her husband she taught politics to her eighth son who became a very good ruler.

All the ladies should, therefore, follow the footprints of Madālasā and other such brave and learned ladies and train their children likewise. This can only be possible if the women are educated and have acquired the requisite knowledge as well. Only then they can teach and train their children accordingly. But unfortunately for centuries, Indian women have been subjected to neglect, torture and humiliation; as such in the 19th century a series of religious and social reform movements were started under which these women were freed from social bondage and oppression. Rājā Rāma Mohana Roy, Īśvara Candra Vidyāsāgara, Swāmī Vivekānanda, Swāmī Rāma Tīrtha and other such notable figures, therefore, laid a great stress on

the proper education of the women in order to achieve this mission. However, in the acknowledgement of endeavour afforded by the mother in elevating and making her child a perfect man it becomes his (child's) moral duty not to neglect her rather remain ever grateful and indebted to her, who in reality is a visible (प्रत्यक्ष) *Devī Mātā*.

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स्त्रियां तु रोचमानायां सर्वं तद्रोचते कुलम्।
तस्यां त्वरोचमानायां सर्वमेव न रोचते॥

"The families where the ladies are happy, cheerful and attractive through ornamentation etc., look beauteous and in adverse conditions where ladies look dirty, gloomy and repulsive the entire family looks ugly.

—*Manu Smṛti* (III.62)

When Yājñavalkya permits second marriage during the life-time of the first wife—

सुरापी व्याधिता धूर्ता वन्ध्यार्थघ्न्यप्रियंवदा।
स्त्रीप्रसूश्चाधिवेत्तव्या पुरुषद्वेषिणी तथा॥
अधिविन्ना तु भर्तव्या महदेनोऽन्यथा भवेत्।
यत्रानुकूल्यं दंपत्योस्त्रिवर्गस्तत्र वर्धते॥

"If the wife is habituated drinker, suffering from prolonged illness, cunning and treacherous, sterile, exceptionally extravagant, a stringant speaker, capable of giving birth to the daughters only and finally who always conspires against the interest of her husband; under such circumstances the man should marry again but the first wife in no case should be abandoned. Even under such circumstances the first wife should be fed and clad well and properly looked after. Otherwise great sin will occur. The virtues, prosperity and the accomplishment of desires are on the increase in the homes where wife and husband are affectionately favourable to each other."

—*Yājñavalkya Smrti* (I. 73-74)

Zamīrana
(A Story)

There lived a respectable Muslim family in Agra. A beautiful girl named Zamīrana enhanced the beauty of the house. The father Ikabāla Ahamada was a famous physician of Agra. As per Muslim conventions she was married while she was just a kid of nine years. Her father-in-law was a renowned barrister in Agra itself. As per the Godly design, her husband went to Lucknow in connection with his advanced studies and there he became a prey to influenza and passed away while Zamīrana was in her parental home itself. Now she was just fourteen when she became a widow. Both the families were engulfed by the ocean of grief and bereavement. It took quite some time for them to recover from the shock. However time is the best healing factor. Slowly and gradually everybody forgot the accident and the life became normal. But Zamīrana was still abnormal.

She was perhaps made of some different metal. Eventhough at the time of her marriage she didn't know the real import of marriage; she had hardly seen her bridegroom; she was not even properly acquainted with her husband yet since that day nobody saw a ray of smile on her lips. She remained quite absent-minded, completely unconcerned and disinterested in her family affairs. As a matter of fact a strange sense of indifference developed in her. She stopped taking interest in any social activities. The whole day while awake she was always busy in as if brooding over something. Her father was very much tormented to see his only child in that wretched condition. After all she was the pupil of his eyes.

In Muslim community being widow is not any problem of serious nature nor is remarriage prohibited by Muslim scriptures. Her father with the consultation of his son started searching for a suitable match for Zamīrana. They were successful in finding a handsomely built and cultured boy whom they thought a suitable partner for Zamīrana. But the real problem was who should bell the cat. Ikabāla Ahamada could not gather the necessary courage to talk to his daughter for her remarriage.

One day he made a decision and approached Zamīrana in her room. He was parental love and affection embodied. He said—"Look here my darling, I cannot bear to watch the clouds of gloom over your face. It is a heart-rending scene to me. We do not know what wrong we have done that I happened to see this day. But you know re-dressal is not impossible. We are Muslims and even *Qurāna Śarīfa*, our loftiest scripture prescribes remarriage. You are a small kid like a lovely doll. The entire life is lying ahead of you. Will it not be advisable to get yourself remarried? I have found a boy very handsome, well to do, highly educated and well-cultured. Apparently there is nothing wanting in him. So far I could not muster the courage to put up the proposal before you. But after all how long will this state of suspense continue? You know you are my only child. Your brother is there of course but since your mother left this world you become the sole responsibility of mine. I will not force you to do something against your wishes but I do wish to see you happy again. I hope you will not disappoint me. There is no hurry. Think it over and convey your decision to me."

Zamīrana took no time and curtly replied—"Daddy, I cannot tell you how I love you. I think I was very lucky to have an affectionate father like you. I am really pained to make any refusal to what you say. There is a very strange and strong urge within me. It seems some unknown power is compelling me not to accept your proposal, My venerable father, I cannot remarry.

This is my firm and final decision. I hope you will excuse me even if I may be committing a mistake." She started weeping. The tear drops rolled down on her cheeks. Ikabāla Ahamada could not bear Zamīrana shedding tears. He embraced her and said—"My love, pardon me. Hereafter I will not come to you with such proposals. Let my happiness merge into your satisfaction." And he came back. But her brother was not a case of easy surrender. He argued. He tried to convince her. He cajoled her and he even threatened her. But all of no avail. She was firm like a rock. She refused and that was once for ever. The neighbouring ladies also tried their best to make her agree to remarry but they were summarily dismissed by a retorting Zamīrana. Her no was a final no. Eventually everybody gave up the idea of persuading her. Now Zamīrana was all alone by herself.

She sometimes looked towards the ceiling, sometimes the wall and sometimes nowhere with her blank eyes. More often than not her time passed in shedding tears. Her body day-by-day went on thinning and the glowing face went on paling. Physicians—Ayurvedic, Allopathic and Hakīmas came. No effort was spared but no physician could diagnose her disease correctly and the medicines administered, did not yield any favourable result. God knows what happened to Zamīrana that she avoided the company and relished the solitude, always busy in thinking and brooding. If somebody motivated she bathed, if somebody said she took meals. Otherwise she lost every interest in maintaining and preserving her bodily health. What she required only God knew.

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Those days the name of one Janakasutā Śaraṇa—a narrator of holy *Rāmāyaṇa Kathā*—was on every tongue in Agra. He was giving discourses on the story of holy *Rāmāyaṇa* everyday. He was a devotee of high order. It was his devotion which infused a life, an unearthly sweetness which was capable of maddening the crowd. There reigned a pin drop silence

throughout his discourse. Every listener remained as if in trance. Zamīrana also heard about the discourse and the narrator. One day she also decided to attend the gathering. She wore her mantle and alongwith a neighbouring *Vaiśya* lady went to the place. She did not inform her family members. She went there and sat in the last row alongwith her friend. It was a huge gathering. In such gatherings nobody cares who is who and what is what. Everybody was engrossed in drinking the nectar of narration.

That day the *Kathā* was that of Śrī Rāma's exilement in the forest and his dialogue with the ferryman. The *Mahātmā's* eloquent speech made the narration sweeter and injected a thrill in the atmosphere. An unearthly attraction. There was no listener whose eyes were not wet. A mighty current of pathos was flowing and overpowering the audience. During his discourse the *Mahātmā* did not forget narrating the story of Rasakhāna and the butcher Sadana—both Mohammadens. He presented a vivid picture of the ferryman's devotion and the generosity of Lord Rāma which made the listeners spell-bound. The narrator himself forgot his individuality and the listeners were already submerged in the ocean of devotion. So there remained *Kathā* and *Kathā* alone. Very often the narrator tried to say something but his voice was choked with emotion and devotion and he momentarily became dumb. The time approached to close the *Kathā* and the narrator stopped. The listeners did not want *Kathā* to stop but the *Mahātmā* overruled the objection and postponed the rest of the narration for the next day. *Kathā* came to a stop. *Āratī* was performed. *Prasāda* was distributed and people returned to their homes. The *Vaiśya* lady also asked Zamīrana to come but she stopped her also. When they got an opportunity, both of them went near the *Mahātmā*, paid their salutation and stood aside. The *Mahātmā* asked—"What questions do you intend to ask?" Now spoke Zamīrana—"Grand Sir, may I read the book from which you were narrating the story?" Zamīrana could read Hindi well. The *Mahātmā* said—"Why,

what objection could there be?" Apparently he was taken aback. The *Vaiśya* lady informed him of her being a Mohammaden. The *Mahātmā* was composed again. He told them that everybody was entitled to read and recite the holy *Rāmāyaṇa* and make a *Japa* of *Rāma-Nāma*. Rāma is not an exclusive belonging of Hindus. He belongs to everybody and everybody belongs to Him. Saying so, the Mahātmā handed over a small book of holy *Rāmacaritamānasa* and advised Zamīrana to recite and study it daily and make a *Japa* of *Rāma-Nāma*. Zamīrana bent and put her forehead on the feet of the *Mahātmā*. Mentally she accepted him to be her spiritual preceptor. Since that day she never missed any discourse. She was the first person to reach the canopy and the last one to leave it after the end of discourse.

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This conduct of Zamīrana caused a great turmoil in the Muslim environment. She was defamed as a nihilist or *Vidharmī* (irreligious). There was nothing serious. Zamīrana stopped reciting *Namāza* and used to study the holy *Rāmāyaṇa* of Hindus. She gave up non-vegetarian meals also. That was all. Her father, the doctor, could not do a thing. He was not willing and prepared to reject his only daughter. He was afraid of his daughter falling sick by weeping excessively if he adopted a stern attitude. On the other side the Muslim brethrens of the locality were after him for chastising his daughter. Eventually he boldly told everybody not to interfere in Zamīrana's affairs. Whatever she did, she did.

There is a set pattern of social thinking and action. For sometime society actively feels and talks about something and then gradually even the hot topic of the present goes into oblivion. So happened in case of Zamīrana also. As the time passed people stopped talking about her. Everybody else cooled down but not her brother. He insisted and scolded her to throw that book of Hindus, get remarried and his wife always felt annoyance because Zamīrana was not taking non-vegetarian meals. She nicknamed her

Bhagatina (a devotee Hindu lady) and taunted very off and on.

Zamīrana did not mind it all. As she was a bit carefree due to the liberal attitude of her father. The brother also feared his father and could not take any strong action. This way days were passing on. Zamīrana felt disgusted with her family members. Only the tie of filial affection tied her. She did not relish even talking to her brother and sister-in -law. Her daily recital and worship was not without disturbance. Slowly a stage came when she could not bear even cooking of meat and didn't like to see them eating it.This all became unbearable to her. Whenever the meat came in the house she used to close herself in her room and passed that day on milk and fruits. Such incidents were not uncommon. Almost twenty days in the month she went without food.

Gradually Ayodhya attracted her. Without any apparent reason impulsively she wanted to leave Agra and go to Ayodhya. More than once she thought of going to that holy place but her affection to her father stood like a Himalaya in her way and every time she dropped the idea. The attraction went on increasing and alongwith that the inner urge went on getting stronger and stronger. However none can stop the person whom the divinity must be summoning. All of a sudden cholera broke out in its epidemic form in Agra and her father, the doctor was swallowed by it. Everybody in the house was crying and screaming, shedding tears, tossing and tumbling but Zamīrana's eyes were not even moistened. Like a mad person she was looking to the sky with unwinking eyes.

All kith and kins gathered. The procession alongwith the dead body of the doctor fully decorated with flowers, proceeded to the burial ground. Zamīrana also, eventhough dissuaded by all, went alongwith the procession. The dead body was buried. Flowers were offered, *Fātehā* was read and everybody went back to his respective home. Nobody saw where Zamīrana went. They took it for granted that she must have gone to her parental

house. The same evening she was seen once again on the grave of her father but after that nobody saw her in Agra. The brother tried his best to search for her. He advertised even an award of Rs. 500/— to whosoever had any information about her whereabouts. All attempts failed and slowly everybody forgot her.

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Soon after that a Muslim lady about whom anybody knew nothing was seen in Ayodhya and she became a subject of common gossip. All her conduct was like that of a mad person. She was not at all offensive or aggressive but everybody called her *Pagalī Mā* (the mad mother). She did not speak at all, talked to nobody and accepted nothing from the people. Nobody knew where she lived and what she ate. A couple of times a few persons followed her to find her address but after walking 2-3 miles they gave up the idea of following and came back. On rare occasions she tossed a fruit towards somebody and he or she felt blessed. She visited *Kanaka Bhawana* once everyday and placed her forehead at the outer door-frame of *Kanaka Bhawana* and paid her *Sijdā* perhaps. One day while paying her *Sijdā* at *Kanaka Bhawana* she did not rise. All the *Vaiṣṇava* devotees took her funeral procession with great pomp and show reciting *Rāmāyaṇa* and chanting *Kīrtana* to the bank of Sarayū and immersed her dead body in the river. Incidently it was a *Rāmanavamī* day. Eventually she met her Lord.

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Surpassing all people my husband alone is my lord; but due to the curse of the sage he will die when the sun rises; for this reason only I cursed the sun. (I have not done so) through anger, delusion, greed, or desire of carnal gratification or hatred.

—*Padma Purāṇa, Sṛṣṭi Khaṇḍa* (51.72-73)

Sufferings of Womenfolk

—Bhaskar B. Baliga

Is female born to suffer? Her life is a series of deprivations, indignities, hard work and finally negligence by her own kith and kin; suffering at every stage of life from birth to death. And these days it starts even before birth. She has to adjust herself in every phase of her life in the male dominated society and often to the elderly of her own female community. This is not confined to any single society, region or country. It is universal; males have always tried to extract their dues from females, because of their physical superiority, as if the creator has condemned the weaker sex right at the time of creation.

It is not possible to consider the problem in general but let us try to see around us in our own country, because of the limited extent of the article. Our rich culture, which goes back to millenia and our history has not spared the woman. Our mythology and history has given her an exalted position, at the same time even in our golden period, indignities have been thrust upon her and made her to suffer in silence. In the ideal times of *Rāmarājya*, Rāvaṇa kidnaps Sītā with base motive, but his sophisticated culture prevents him from physically satisfying himself as he awaits her to surrender to him. Even after getting rescued by her husband, she had to undergo trial by fire to prove her innocence and purity during the period of captivity. In spite of all these travails when she had just started to taste good and peaceful life, she was banished to the forest—a would be mother, a few months short of her delivery—on the overheard words of a washerman. Born in the palace, deprived, jungle life was her

lot. She produced the successors to the Ayodhyā *Rājya* brought them up to stand on their feet and disappeared; a life of dedication and total sacrifice.

What was the fate of Ahalyā? Suspected to have seen the shadow of males, she was condemned to lie as a stone on a forest path by her own husband, a great *Ṛṣi*, a learned man. It was nothing different in the epic of *Mahābhārata*, a period considerably later and the society was supposed to have evolved in its culture and sophistication. But the latter seems to be only in the methods of pouring indignities on the womenfolk. Take the case of Draupadī alone. A belle reared in the palace was won in *Swayamvara* by Arjuna, a prince without a kingdom, wandering in the jungles alongwith his four brothers and the mother. When they reached their make-shift abode, they announced to their mother that they have brought a prize. Without waiting to enquire what it was she asked them to distribute equally amongst the five brothers. Once the sentence was uttered by the elder it could not be taken back, that was the order of the day. It was a strange dilemma. Thus started the married life of Draupadī, to be consort of five brothers. It was indeed a walk on razor's edge for her to keep equality in her love towards her five husbands. She could have been proud for having five strong and brave heroes of the day to protect her but her hopes were also shattered in the full regal *Darbāra* of the *Kauravas*. She was dragged by her hairs from her quarters in the palace (she was also in her periods) and in the presence of the cream of the society, elderly, wise brave and strong men, Duḥśāsana, on the orders of his brother, attempted to disrobe her. The old sire Bhīṣma, Vidura, the wise and the family preceptor Droṇācārya, did not utter a word of protest, leave alone attempting to stave off the impending disaster. Her five husbands who should have gone to her rescue, stood there with their heads hung low. Her unstinted faith in the Lord and the interference of Gāndhārī (who could not have

been a witness as she had closed her eyes vouluntarily with a tape to give company to her blind husband) the drama ended. Today newspapers report every second or third day, such dramas being enacted in many parts of our country where indignities are rained on helpless victims of lower castes; and law keeper police also indulge in such activity as a part of punishment for suspected crime. No interference from Gāndhārī comes forward and the act is taken to its conclusion.

While on the topic of sufferings of Draupadī, her woes did not end with her public humiliation. Seeing herself alone in the world, she vowed to tie the knot in her hair only after oiling them with the blood of Duḥśāsana; the *Caṇḍī* in her was roused. She was able to fulfil her vow during the *Kurukṣetra* war and when she was preparing to join the victory revelry of the war with her husbands, it was cut short by murder of her five grown up sons in their sleep, by none other than Aśwatthāmā, the *Guruputra*. What greater misery can there be for a mother? In the final exit too she was discriminated against; she was first to be dropped in *Pāṇḍava's* journey towards heaven.

The marriage vow in any community in the world is to give company to each other in weal and woe; woe is the lot of woman inveriably. There are innumerable cases of misery and indignities piled upon women by the gender-biased society and even today with the advancement of science and technology which is expected to bring better quality of life, the persecution is going on. It is known that she is created weak, but is it necessary to get this assurance every moment?

Let us scan the situation in India in the present century. According to the census in the beginning of the century, in 1901, the sex ratio (females to 1,000) was 972 which declined steadily to 933 in 1981 and became 924 in 1991. Since the female birth rate should be equal to that of male one, this difference and steady decline is due to higher death rate in early childhood. It is common in most states in Northern India to look down upon

the female child; even the mother-in-law does not spare the daughter-in-law for giving birth to a female child (as if it is within the hands of the conceiving woman). A sick female child is neglected so that it could die. Invariably the early child deaths are due to malnutrition and maltreatment. Now, since nearly two decades the advancement of science has given the gift to determine the sex of the unborn child, which has been utilised in India to drop the female foetus in early pregnancy. This is the reason why the ratio has declined so rapidly in the last decade. The medical termination of 40,000 female foetuses in 1984 in Bombay alone is a case in point and shows to what length people go to avoid the birth of a girl child. Though Maharashtra has banned the gender-linked abortions, practices continue clandestinely and it is a rich source of income for the surgeons. In the four northern states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, the practice is gaining popularity, the actual figures are not available. Recently there were demands in the *Loka Sabha* to ban foetus sex determination so that it may not be possible to kill the female child in foetus stage.

Another observation of the 1981 census was that the number of girl deaths per 1,000 live births upto the age of five years, to be higher than those of the male children. The respective numbers are 172 and 160 in the rural areas and 95 and 92 in the cities. Caste, religion and region also influence the rate. In addition, the society has created a state of slavish dependence and submissiveness for the girls who survive, especially in the northern states. Girls in the age group 13 to 16, receive less than two thirds of the recommended calorie intake and especially in the low status groups, elementary education is beyond the reach of the girls. The primary reason for his deprivation is the family background, ignorant parents, backward attitudes and lack of resources. Here the girls (as soon as they cross the toddler stage) are enthrusted with domestic responsibilities and other works to support the families with their meagre earnings.

Submissiveness is inculcated in girls (as if it was their crime for having born as female) and invariably they fall victims to its abuse.

According to a recent survey in SAARC countries, there are 6 crore girls here who do not get primary education and majority do not complete their schooling. Many drop out after enrollment. The net result is that more than half the illiterate children in the age group, five to nine, are girls. According to the UNICEF, the ratio of enrollment in India for boys and girls at primary school is 106.12 and 78.89 respectively. Enrollment in upper primary level shows a sharp decline, being 60.6 percent for boys and 35.6 percent for girls.

The 1981 census also reflects on the social practices which result in indifferent treatment of girls. It showed that the average age of marriage of 'currently married women' in the country as a whole was 16.7 years. The trend is particularly bad in some states—Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh—fifty percent of the girls are married at or below the age of 18, despite the prohibition of marriage of the girls before the age of 18. Government efforts have been intensified, in recent years, to educate the people about the early child-bearing and frequent pregnancies, resulting in under-weight babies and frequent deaths of teen-aged mothers, unable to bear the physical stress. Dūradarśana and other media carry the message frequently and many voluntary agencies have joined the propaganda.

The State of World Children Report has many interesting observations: "Most child deaths happen to mothers who are younger than 18 or older than 35 who have had more than four children already or who give birth less than two years after a previous delivery. Preliminary knowledge about importance of timing and promoting the means to act on, it is therefore one of the most powerful child survival strategies.

The present status of women in the society can be gauged from the reports in the daily news papers. No single day passes

without reports of rapes, gang-rapes, molestation, torture and bizzare treatment of women. When educated and right-thinking females come forward to give evidence in courts regarding the indignities committed on them, the court insists on details of each act of the crime, forcing the victim to relive the traumatic experience again. These details are published in the news papers but never a report of examplary punishment given to the criminal (if at all it is given). Are these reports meant for erotic pastimes for the male-dominated society? Many talk about equality and social justice but scant thought is given to this malady in the modern society. Even law enforcing authorities indulge in violating the modesty of womenfolk to give vent to their frustration in not being able to get their required evidence or being able to catch the criminal. Have the governments of state or centre cognition of these incidents and taken steps to punish the guilty officers? Invariably it is forgotten as a non-event. What is required is the proper orientation of our law enforcing department and whenever such parties are sent for investigation, a lady officer be included so that these senseless indignities are not piled on the womenfolk.

Today if we see in the world torn with ethnic violence whether it is in Chechnya, Bosnia, middle-east or Kashmir, the brunt of the sex-based attrocities have been borne by the womenfolk. Again the orphaned children of these clashes become the responsibility of the same half of the socity, without support from any quarters.

The harassment and indignities suffered by working women in their daily life are innumerable. For every report recorded hundreds of others go unreported. It is borne silently by them, keeping a dignified front. The culprits teasing them are from well to do families, reasonably educated but unemployed, having nothing to do, indulge in this pastime. It is really a sociological problem and requires careful handling. It is not a question of punishing the culprits and making them hardened

criminals, but reforming them and bringing them back to the mainstream of the society. Sucitrā Mitra, a great singer of *Rabīndra Saṅgīta* and a well respected lady in the society feels: "Woman must gain strength to fight those who try to victimise them. Why don't they learn karate? Why don't they carry daggers to protect themselves? Let them stab their attackers. Kill them, if need be. They cannot afford to be perpetually gentle and meek, particularly when their honour is at stake......*Śakti* is the power women have. Let them use that as a weapon against all wrong doers." Giving advice is one thing, but acting on it is totally different. Karate may save a girl at one time or in one incident. But as regards killing an offender is concerned, will the society come to the defense of the girl? Or will she have to undergo jail term as any other killer? It is a complex social problem, requiring gentle handling and bringing proper reforms in the society as a whole.

Dowry deaths is a serious menace in post- independent India since the sixties. Not that dowries were not given earlier, or for that matter even today, but the crime associated with it by killing the bride who has come to make her home in completely new surroundings is heinous. It is not only males who indulge in it but the womenfolk of the family are also accomplices. The latter forget that they too came to that house one day from outside. Did she also bankrupt her parents to establish her house? It is indeed a sad commentry that despite all the progressive talks in the society, the girl child is still treated as a salable commodity. As to counter this malady of the society, the educated and enlightened parents thought of educating their daughters equally like boys and made them stand on their own feet. This is a proper check-mate to the age old practice of keeping the girl child deprived of the proper education and having always to depend upon men for small needs, making them feel more helpless than they actually are. It is the social shackles that had kept them back and suffer

in silence. Once they are freed from it, definitely they are second to none.

Today in the metropolises and cities, women work side by side with men and with equal efficiency and acumen. They have entered practically all fields, including some of the exclusive male domains. In education, commerce, management, engineering, entrepreneureship, police, military and even air-force, they work shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts. They are competing equally well in many of the sports which were exclusive male citadels. They play cricket, football and even wrestling. It is not that they just play, they excel too. This has brought a new confidence in this new breed who see sky as their only limit. This success of womenfolk in relatively short time is brewing new problems in the society. The convener of the *Nārī Niryātana Pratirodha Mañca* Smt. Maitreyī Catterjī gave expression to this apprehension in following words: "Society imposes an impossible code of behaviour on women wherein being a victim of molestation becomes a sort of crime. Our immediate reaction is that something must be wrong with the girl. As for protection, men will defend you so long as you follow certain specified norms. Now that women have become their rivals in education and careers, they won't raise a finger to protect them".

As repeated a few times, this is the crux of the problem complex societal problem. In mitigating one we create new ones. It should not be a discouragement. They are the signs of a dynamic society where one change leads to another. When educating girls is the right step since it makes them walk with head erect and be useful part of the society, the deep rooted conservatism in the society will require a bit longer time to be erased. Again it will take time for the menfolk to be convinced that they will have to work harder to match the challenges they are facing in the jobs. Once this is realised the march of the society will be really progressive. Eventually,

everything boils down to alleviation of poverty and educating the masses, that too, in our country, in the rural areas. This is no mean task and may take a generation. Only right education can initiate a process of social change and the womenfolk may find a new hope and initiative to work side by side with men, with reciprocative feeling. Afterall, to be born a female is not so gloomy, we are marching towards a new dawn!

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A lady came to a saint and put the question, "My husband died a few months ago, what shall I do to save him ?" The lady was very despondent and very anxious to save her husband. The saint said— "You can save your husband; you need not be despondent; you should abide by my advice. Everyday whenever you feel despondent, or when the thought of your husband comes to you, sit down at once, close your eyes, and place before your mind the body of your husband, and you know that the object of our affection can immediately appear before our mind. When you get this picture before your mind or when you get the body of your husband before the mind, do not grieve or be sorry do not sob or cry, by sobbing and crying, by shedding tears you simply make your husband cling to the earth, you fasten him to the world, and your work is perverted and degrading. You should not try to bring him down, you should not try to lower him or retard his progress. You can think of the different world of your husband, you can think of him not as dead (because with your eyes closed, the picture of the husband comes most vividly before you) but as living. When you have it before you, then feel, feel, realize that he is God; tell him, preach to him, say continually, pour forth this idea before him,"You are God, divinity, you are the Lord; in your picture, in your body, in your form, it is the divinity that is appearing to me.

—*Swami Rama Tirtha*

The Son and the Great Mother

—Balram Kumar Mani Tripathi

O Goddess of fertility—Mahākālī !
The shade of death and the elixir of immortality
Are your grace.
Creation, protection and annihilation
Are your play.
The bow and arrow denote the power of will.
O Goddess of wisdom, learning
Music and the art—Mahāsaraswatī !
The mind, intellect and ego
Are nothing without you
You are the unending pleasure and peace of a *Yogī.*
You are the mother of all the creatures
Pervading this world and also supreme.
O Goddess of fortune and prosperity—Mahālakṣmī !
The rich or poor people's fate
Depends upon your blessings.
You are the cause of pleasure and pain.
O Tripurā Sundarī !
We pray to your pious feet
For the realization of the Absolute
Give power to seek
The transcendental peace
Infinite pleasure
And the aim of the life—Supreme.

Matrimonial Disputes and Family Courts

—Poosha

Marriage is a social institution. It is the very foundation of our civilized society and both the public and the state are interested in its stability.

Marriage among Hindus is sacramental and is believed to have been ordained in heaven. In marriage man accepts the woman as his better half by assuring her protection and companionship. A girl born and brought up in her natural family has to leave the natural setting and come into a new family. In arranged marriages usually care is taken to ensure that there is not much of variation of the temparament, culture and community habits, rituals etc. However, the process of adaptation to new family life is a difficult task and cannot be only one-sided. There has to be always some give and take, live and let live—when this balance is disturbed we observe that there is a dispute in that couple.

Always the girl has to adopt to a new set of relationships, one type with husband and another with parents-in-law and a different one with her superiors and subordinates, in that family where she enters. Therefore, the process of adaptation though seemingly natural is rather tricky, there has to be exhibition of co-operation and willingness from each side. Otherwise the conflicts start from the beginning which ultimately lead to matrimonial disharmony.

With increasing industrialization and urbanization the problem of marital disharmony has aggravated. As the traditional bonds get weakened exposing those dependent on families to increasing stress and strains.

Because of spread of education, consciousness of her rights and feeling of emancipation of woman from male domination, their economic independence and break down of joint family system more and more disputes are coming across.

There are some other causes of matrimonial disputes such as personality disorders among spouses either psychiatric problems or sex perversion in either spouse. Then the problems of addiction to alcohol or drugs which also leads to disturbed family life and disharmony in a couple.

All these disturbed families have its effects on the spouses. The children also get affected by the disturbances in their families. They develop behavioural or scholastic problems and sometime they are also made scapegoats in the entire process of matrimonial disharmony. Then another set of persons which get disturbed are the other family members such as in-laws. This ultimately has its effects on the society at large.

Therefore, adjudication of these matters (family dispute) is a sensitive task, which is unique in several respects.

These matters need to be handled on humanitarian grounds. The process of handling these matters requires closed set up and so hearing in camera is advisable. Also the handling of these disputes means handling or dealing with human emotions, personal interaction and family structures. Therefore, to handle these disputes we require a person who is well equipped by professional training. The matrimonial dispute is to be handled in totality. As matrimonial disputes involve not only husband and wife but cause adverse effects on both the spouse, their families and children. It involves human relationships which are very complex and hence one needs to have multidisciplinary approach while working at Family Courts.

Urologist...............Gyneacologist.......................Psychiatrist
Counsellor.............Client.............................Speech Therapist
Legal Practitioner..Sexologist..........................Psychologist
(Multidisciplinary Approach)

Giving importance to all these aspects the Family Court Act is framed.

(2) Several women organisations and individuals have urged from time to time Family Courts to be set up for the settlement of family disputes. The Law Commission in its 59th report (1974) had also stressed that in dealing with disputes covering the Family Court ought to adopt an approach radically different from that adopted in ordinary civil proceedings and that it should make reasonable efforts. Court should try settlement before the commencement of the trial.

The Code of Civil Procedure was amended in 1976 to provide for a special procedure to be adopted in any proceedings related to family matters. And therefore, the need was felt to establish the Family Courts for speedy settlements.

(3) Ever since the Indian Constitution was adopted there have been several attempts at different levels in Government and outside to make justice easier and to make equal justice under Law a functional reality to all irrespective of one's sex, religion or economic level of living as granted under constitution of India. Family Law is basic to human dignity and development.

The Act has twin objectives—

(a) Promoting reconciliation and (b) Expediting settlement of Family Disputes.

The Act makes certain radical changes with regard to Court atmosphere and procedure.

The important features of the Act are—

(1) To select and appoint those persons as Judges who are committed to project and preserve institution of marriage, promote welfare of children.

(2) Appointment of counsellors

(3) Assistance of social welfare agencies

(4) Assistance of medical and welfare agencies

(5) Keep away technical rules of evidence Act

(6) A flexible infrastructure mechanism and innovative

methods of disposition are provided.

At all stages the presumption is that the Family Court would be able to resolve the Family disputes faster with the assistance of Counsellors. As reconciliation of the parties and amicable rejoining of the parties is not the only object but in certain cases it may be separation, dissolution of the marriage, decision about children, custody, maintenance and access within a short period and avoiding long drawn legal battles.

The Counsellors are competent persons and are accountable to the court and their clients. In conciliation and counselling procedure an issue which arises is that of confidentiality of the information given. Though the Act is silent on this issue, rule 24 of Maharashtra Family Courts Act Rules provide for non-disclosure of the details.

Based on the Family Court principles U/Sec. 21 of the Act the State of Maharashtra and the High Court has framed different set of rules. These rules give the guidelines about procedure to be adopted in establishment of Family Courts and appointment of Judges, Councellors and other requirements of the Act like association of welfare agencies, medical experts, appointed of *amicus curiae*.

The marriage is considered sacramental among Hindus. The Hindu Marriage and Divorce Act 1955 provides conditions so as to perform valid marriage. If the condition are not fulfilled the marriage is invalid. Section 5 and 7 of the Hindu Marriage Act and Divorce provides these conditions. Though marriage is sacramental it is considered as on contract as per section 5 of the Act and still sacramental aspect of marriage is preserved under section 7 of Hindu Marriage Act.

The divorce was granted only if one party is guilty of any matrimonial offence and the other party being innocent. The innocent party had to prove the default of spouse and his/her own innocence. The default of guilty party and also the innocence of petitioner needed to be proved for obtaining

divorce. This is what is called guilty theory of divorce. In present days this theory is moved a few steps ahead and theory of irretrievable breakdown is demanded. Once the marriage is proved to have been broken irretrievably though both the parties are not at fault or both are at fault, it does not make any difference. Under the guilt theory if both the parties are guilty they cannot obtain divorce. The Law Commission in its 71st report recommended irretrievable breakdown as ground for divorce. Unfortunately the same was not sanctioned due to resistance of welfare organisations.

In 1976 amendment, the divorce by mutual consent was introduced. Now in addition to this there are two other grounds available for divorce on the theory of irretrievable breakdown.

(1) Order of judicial separation and on resumption for one year or more;

(2) Order of restitution and no reconciliation for one year or more. On the above grounds either party can file for divorce.

Regarding matrimonial offence it is difficult to give direct evidence. So the question has to be decided on whether on evidence the court can be satisfied beyond reasonable doubts that offence was by direct evidence. In Dastane Vs. Dastane it was settled that onus lies on petitioner to prove the fault beyond reasonable doubts (AIR 1975 Supreme Court p. 1534).

The Family Court also decides matter pertaining to the custody of an access of children. The welfare of the child is paramount consideration. If the child is old enough, his wishes can be asked and his wishes may be given weightage but the welfare of child is the paramount consideration. Such welfare would prevail over parental rights. Parental rights would enter into a consideration as one of the factor in considering the welfare of the child but not as a dominating factor where they would conflict with the welfare of child.

Keeping these principles in mind either the custody of the access of children is decided and given to either parent.

While working with children of broken families or spouses having marital discard though staying together, one needs to work with children and also with the couple of families. These children often have behavioural problem, they often become manipulative or leaser to take advantage of one parent etc. The child needs interview, to get educated properly which is generally done through play therapy.

In Family Court the task of ascertaining children s wishes is done with the help of a Counsellor, interview both the parents, also the children and he/she prepares a complete study report of the child which includes child's relations with either parent, mental state and environment study of either parent. This report is submitted to the court.

On the basis of this report and Judges' own evaluation an order of custody or access is passed. Initially, the access to a non-custodian parent is given in the court premises where the 1st few accesses are done under the supervision of trained professional person. The atmosphere in the access room is made healthy which helps to build healthy relationship of child with the non-custodian parent.

Law Commission has given following recommendations for removal of discrimination against women in matters relating to guardianship and custody of minor children—

1st recommendation—mother should have same and equal (not inferior rights vis-a-vis).

2nd recommendation—custody of a minor who has not completed 12 years of age shall ordinarily be with the mother.

3rd recommendation—the grand parents shall have equal claim in matter of appointment of guardian to the minor irrespective of the fact that neither they are paternal or maternal grand parents.

Section 9 of the Family Court is very clear that maximum efforts to be made by the court to bring about settlement between the parties and the entire infrastructure of the Family

Court to be geared for the same.

Immediately after the filing of the petition the parties are under the control of the court to attempt for reconciliation if possible. As the matters are referred to the Marriage Counsellor to bring about the conciliation or settlement. Even if the dissolution of marriage is sought by the joint petition, the court has to make endeavour to bring reconciliation between the parties.

When the parties decide to live together as a preliminary experiment of the court's intervention, the court can adjourn the petition to see the success of the experiment. And such living together as an experiment would not prejudice the petition. Thus, parties can try to save their marriage without prejudice to their rights and contentions.

Marriage being the most important social institution, all possible efforts must be made to find out. the true cause of the breach and corrective measures to save the marriage. Therefore, when the matter is referred to Marriage Counsellor he/she tries to understand the problem. If the counsellor or court feels that particular matter requires a special expertise such as medical advice or any particular therapist advice, the court or the counsellor can refer the party to such experts for taking their opinion and guidance on the parties' problem. The provision of such a referal is available in section of the Act which talk about assistance of medical and welfare experts. On their guidelines of the section the State Government as well as the High Court has made rules which make the provision of forming a panel of their experts in medical as well as in social welfare field whose help can be taken from time to time.

The object of the Act for making conciliation efforts does not mean that the parties must be forced even against their wishes or interests to patch up a marriage, which cannot be amended (dead marriage). Therefore, a judicious approach is essential where the Judge and Counsellors think that the marriage is. already broken down beyond repair and in the

interest of the parties and children, breaking of the tie is important than preserving, such advise or steps also can be taken for an amicable settlement to avoid lengthy litigation and trials. When one party files for divorce and it is observed that the marriage is totally broken and the other party consents to it, in such cases the same petition of divorce is amended to consent petition, which serves two purposes, one is to avoid additional litigation and another is to save time.

Section 11 of Family Court Act satisfies the need of keeping the disputes to the parties themselves. As this section provides hearing of the matters in camera the philosophy behind this is that family disputes are personal matters and third person has no right to know the ordinary pursuit. The right of the parties is recognised by the legislators not only in this Act but in any marriage law. This Act provides for holding the proceedings in camera not only at the desire of parties but further gives discretionary power to the Court to hold the proceedings in camera if the facts of the proceedings so requires in the opinion of the court even if parties do not make such request.

Section 13 of Family Court Act states that—Notwithstanding anything contained in any law, no party to a suit or proceeding before a Family Court shall be entitled, as of right, to be represented by legal practitioner provided that if Family Court considers it necessary in interest of justice it may seek the assistance of legal expert as *amicus curiae*.

Thus, party is prohibited from engaging any legal practitioner without permission of the court. Power to permit representation by legal practitioner is vested in the court.

The section in this Act cannot be said to be ultra vires, since Advocate enrolled under Advocates Act 1961 has no absolute right to practise before all courts and tribunals.

The Bombay High Court while dealing with modality of entitlement to be represented by legal practitioner before the Family Court is concerned, has laid down as follows—

A perusal of section 13 of the Act indicates that a party to a proceeding before Family Court shall not be entitled as of right to be represented by a legal practitioner. Section 13 does not prescribe total bar to representation by legal practitioner, Bar would itself be unconstitutional. It is well-known fact that the adjudication of a complicated or highly contested matrimonial dispute in light of the law and interpretation or provision by different Courts over a period of time would require in given case assistance from a legally trained mind and for this purpose the court has been empowered to seek the assistance of legal expert. As for as uneducated and poor persons are concerned they are being totally handicapped in the conduct of their cases for want of legal assistance. Even as for as persons coming from educated and professional structure are concerned, the obvious difficulty that is involved, namely the drafting of applications and pleadings in consonance with the court requirement and ability to conduct an examination-in-chief or a cross-examination are skills which one cannot expect of a lay person. The inevitable result is that the parties are handicapped resulting in possible miscarriage of justice. It is clear that reading section 13 with rule 37 of Family Court Rules 1988 that adequate provision has been made for legal representation and in the absence of convincing reasons such permission ought not to be turned down.

Principle of Dr. Rādhākṛṣṇan to survive, we need a revolution in our thoughts and outlook. From the alter of the past, we should take the living fire and not the dead ashes. Let us remember the past, be alive to the present and create the future with courage in our hearts and faith in ourselves when one is thinking on above principle. The Family Court symbolises a very modest beginning showing an awareness that human consideration are paramount in family laws and should not be allowed to be submerged in the flood of other kind litigation.

Looking at the increasing trend of this type of litigation, and the complexity of these problems Family Courts are must

and there is a need for expanding its establishment and, these Courts should not only be for the urban areas however, should be established where and when Government think it necessary to open such courts. Other litigants deprived of the services available at the Family Courts such as special attention, availability of counselling service and association of welfare agencies and medical experts. Courts are not existing. Therefore, when we guarantee in our constitution, justice shall be given easier way, speedy and there shall not be any discrimination while delivering such justice on the grounds of one's sex, religion or economic condition, we think that Family Courts are a must. As in a pluralised society like India preserving bewildering variety of personal laws and giving importance to women and children Family Courts are the ideal answer.

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देवो मनुष्यो गन्धर्वो युवा चापि स्वलंकृतः।
द्रव्यवानभिरूपो वा न मेऽन्यः पुरुषो मतः॥
नाभुक्तवति नास्नाते नासंविष्टे च भर्तरि।
न संविशामि नाश्नामि सदा कर्मकरेष्वपि॥

"Whether it is a god, Gandharva or fully bedecked and charmingly handsome a young man, my mind is never attracted towards him. I do not take food unless I have fed my husbands and their servants. Until and unless they finish their bathing I do not take bath and I go to bed only after they are slept."

—*Mahābhārata, Vana Parva* (233. 23-24)

She should never eat flesh brought from a market. (Then) she would obtain the fruit of the performance of thousands of horse-sacrifices, at the end of the year.

—*Padma Purāṇa, Sṛṣṭi Khaṇḍa* (52. 74b—75a)

Women's Life

(Right of Equality to Women—A Movement)

—Bishnupada Misra

God created life in whatever form in two sexes—male and female. So too in case of human beings, man and woman. They are not parallel rivals but complementary to each other, each essentially needing the other for its own completion i.e., creation, sustenance and realisation. One is incomplete without the other. Although, for our convenience we conceive the creator as God or Goddess, while attaching a form to the creator, it is really not known if the formless *Brahma* is He or She. Rather the Vedic literature from times immemorial, as realised and propagated by the seers of the ages, clearly conceptualises *Brahma* as the universal Existence—Static, void of form, colour, smell, taste etc., while its manifestation in these various manners, is *Māyā*—the dynamic force aspect of the Existence. To illustrate the point clearly Swāmī Śivānanda says—like the common existence of wood in various articles of sofa, chair, stool, door, window etc., or of gold in various articles of necklace, bangle, ring etc., the common existence, common to all that exists in whatever form is *Brahma* and its appearance in so many different ways is *Māyā*. Yet *Brahma* and *Māyā* are not separate but are the two sides of the same coin. *Brahma* has no expression without *Māyā* and *Māyā* has no existence without *Brahma*. So too though there is specific difference between man and woman they are not unequal nor separate. Thus in the ultimate analysis, all the activities and appearances of both man and woman are *Māyā* and their only common existence is *Brahma*. No man is completely a man and no woman is completely a woman. Completeness and

perfection is the exclusive quality of Him or Her, whatever you may call the source. This point has first to be very clearly understood if one is sincere to go to the question of equality of man and woman, which needs deep delving and maturity of thought instead of mere superfluous comparison or light comments.

The so-called modern women of today in particular who have taken up the movement of right of equality to women (with men), are to be educated about this truth very clearly, so that they need not strive so much and in a wrong way for the liberation movement, as they otherwise call it. Now the real question is, "Which is the prison, they need liberation from ?" Unless this question is answered the whole movement will remain unsuccessful. The woman of today understands, by liberation, freedom for going out of the home, to whatever the place i.e., the street, the service place; meeting, fighting gangsters or film-like exposing and violence of the modern cities or doing acts like driving while smoking. But home is not the prison to be free from and these are not the spheres of life which demarcate the difference between man and woman as all these activities are performed by physical strength and mind's intelligence possessed by both man and woman, of course to a different degree. Equality need not be proved by such gross performances. They are equal and have been created to be so (50-50, not 51-49) and yet different. This primary difference and complementary nature is instrumental in God's desire to continue the creation. There are specific areas reserved for man and woman separately i.e., a role performed by woman and vice-versa. This has to be realized without any ambiguity and accepted by both without any hypocrisy in order not to make the problem artificially complicated.

Now that equality has been established as the birth-right of both, this has to be translated into practice without any trace of feeling of high or low. In today's world of masculine domination, man has of course, to take the bad. In doing so,

the beginning should be in imparting true education impartially and equally (not necessarily co-education) to both man and woman to enable them to understand their respective role and God's creation at least in the fundamentals. Needless to say that this education is not possible in today's degree-educational system which is a failure to produce complete human beings out of the present universities. The need of the day is complete education (पूर्णाङ्ग शिक्षा). In order to prove the equality, women, instead of trying to do all the men's work, should assert their own position vehemently and insist on men in giving equal status to both men's and women's work, be it in the office, in the field or in the home. That will bring back the lost dignity. This was the relation in our past heritage which could produce Gārgī, Maitreyī, Ahalyābāī who were not only the teachers and binders of the family, but also in the process, the builders of the nation, social trend-setters, man's confidence-givers and above all the protectors of *Dharma* (not the modern religion). Competitive mind developed in woman mainly because she is neglected and treated as an object of enjoyment as amply clear in today's global scene i.e.,literature, advertisement, entertainment etc., in tune of Western oriented education. Whereas in *Bhāratīya Śikṣā* system, she is adored as the mother and *Devī* irrespective of the fact that she is a daughter, sister wife or mother. Here lies the real solution.

As to many other evils of the present society, for restoration of equality to women also the only panacea is right education in the society in general and to women in particular. Or else, instead of liberated ideal human beings extremists will only be created. In the process of trying to do all the men's work or be like Western women, our women are losing, to tell the hard truth, among many other things, that very thing, essentially their own in nature is their femininity (womanliness), thereby distorting the essentials of God's creation itself. How pathetic! The wisest submission of the educated mind is to accept the

creation as it is. Distortion, suppression, domination or artificiality on part of either man or woman is only ignorance. Realities cannot be ignored forever just in the name of modernity. Let us try to see the truth.

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व्यभिचारादृतौ शुद्धिर्गर्भे त्यागो विधीयते।
गर्भभर्तृवधादौ च तथा महति पातके॥

"Wife can be abandoned if she conceives from somebody other than her husband, takes resort to abortion, murders her husband, or a Brahman. In exceptional cases even if she indulges in unauthorised sexual commerce with somebody else, she does not deserve to be abandoned as she gets purified after the next menstruation."

—*Yājñavalkya Smṛti* (I. 72)

स्वभाव एष नारीणां नराणामिह दूषणम्।
अतोऽर्थान्न प्रमाद्यन्ति प्रमदासु विपश्चितः॥
अविद्वांसमलं लोके विद्वांसमपि वा पुनः।
प्रमदा ह्युत्पथं नेतुं कामक्रोधवशानुगम्॥

"Lustful passion is generated among male members when they come into contact with the women—it is a natural law. This is why the wise men are always careful while dealing with them. The women are capable of dragging the opposite sex on the wrong track whether they are wise or fool."

—*Manu Smṛti* (II.213-214)

Why should mother be worshipped ? Because she made herself pure. She underwent harsh penances sometimes to keep herself as pure as purity can be. For, mind you, no woman in India thinks of giving up her body to any man; it is her own.

—*Swami Vivekananda*

Hindu View of Marriage

—Om Prakash Dubey

The purpose of life in *Hindu Dharma* is fourfold, namely, *Dharma* (right deeds), *Artha* (prosperity), *Kāma* (desire) and *Mokṣa* (salvation). The first three of these constitute the path of *Pravṛtti* (worldly life). That is, a man has to do his *Dharma* which is not simply the duty of popular ethics, but the duty imposed on man by his own nature and tendencies as well as by his birth and profession. *Artha* and *Kāma* mean one has to acquire wealth, gratify his legitimate desires and at the same time practise virtue. The fourth is one of *Nivṛtti* which is attained through the ideal of *Saṁnyāsa* (renunciation). The spirit of *Saṁnyāsa* should pervade all the activities of a man, whether he is a student or a householder or a recluse. We should learn to live in the world without becoming worldly as a lotus leaf rests on the water without becoming wet. Our senses should learn to move freely amidst sense-objects without feeling attraction or repulsion and to act always in obedience to higher self. True *Saṁnyāsa* does not consist merely in retiring from the world but in subduing it to the purposes of the soul. *Pravṛtti* and *Nivṛtti* need not be two different paths opposed to each other. On the other hand, the former should be a preparation for the latter. To lead a perfect life fourfold life is considered essential.

According to *Hindu Dharma* the second stage of life is that of the householder, i.e., *Gṛhastha*. After completing studies, the student may decide to marry and undergo the *Vivāha* (marriage) ceremony. Marriage is regarded as sacred. The Hindu ideal emphasizes the individual and the social aspects of the institution

of marriage. In an ideal marriage the genuine interests of the two members are perfectly reconciled. The perfectly ethical marriage is the monogamous one. The relation of Rāma and Sītā or Sāvitrī and Satyavān, where the two stand by each other against the whole world, is realized in the Hindu scriptures. The general Hindu view regards the woman as the helpmate of man in all his work, *Sahadharmiṇī*. As a matter of fact certain most important rituals in life of a householder are considered incomplete unless the wife participates with the man. Significantly, a couple is always referred to as a *Dampati*. The word *Dampati* in *Saṁskṛta* signifies that they are united in whatever they do and think. They enjoy equal importance. All the symbolisms indicate that the happy marriage is possible only when though being united physically, both partners contribute to each other's progress also and the facial beauty and the features of the body are not the main consideration. They recognise the divinity of each other as the prime consideration.

One of the most significant values inherited by *Hindu Dharma* is the faith in the inner divinity of men. Men and women and all are essentially divine. The basic human relationship between man and woman is the most important and divine. Man and woman are two equally important wheels of a cart. Woman is not considered an object of pleasure in Hindu culture. God is worshipped as *Śakti*, the mother of all creation. Men and women are complimentary to one another. It is objectionable even to use the expression "the weaker sex" for women. The relationship of man and woman in marriage is the most intimate social relation. By remaining true to one's own inherent nature, man and woman realize more and more that they are incomplete without the other. It is only by this basic conviction that they can enrich their own life as well as the social life.

The Upanishadic seers believed that for a fine, artistic, durable and useful texture of the fabric of society, it is a must to realise that man-woman relationship should be based on a

harmonious adjustment of rights and duties between wife and husband. For this reason only, the home is considered an *Āśrama.* Hindu approach to social relationships is not one-sided and never force the life of the people into any fanatic narrow mould. Hindu culture has not derived any facet of a personality and look at the life as a whole, and so even *Kāma* and *Artha* aspects of man and woman are studied in comprehensive way. The subtle but very important facet is that these aspects are not the ultimate end. They are only a help to mould harmonious life. On one hand, the home is a biological setting of father, mother and children and on the other hand, it provides the most ideal environment for flowering a personality in his or her development. If one-sided selfish interests dominate a man or woman, they ultimately lead him or her to sheer frustration and disaster. But a home, i.e., *Gṛhasthāśrama* makes a person contented and liberated because he or she learns to experience fulfilment through sacrifice for the other member of the family. The concept of home and man-woman relationships emphasizes that co-operation is not subjugation. To be true to one's natural virtue as a man and a woman and simultaneously being always conscious about the importance of harmony, is not surrender. The grand idea of the *Ardhanārīśvara,* i.e., each completing the other, is the basis of a positive, life-long union between man and woman.

The marriage is the most important of all the *Hindu Saṁskāras* (sacraments). The ritual of Hindu marriage is based on the faith in the divinity of man-woman relationship and the *Gṛhasthāśrama*, i.e., home. Different stages in the ritual of marriage emphatically hint that the marriage is not merely fulfilment of a person's biological or psychological needs but it signifies much more. The Hindu marriage ceremony is very unique and symbolic. The symbolisms express clearly Hindu vision of man-woman relationship and its significance. There are different symbolic rituals in a Hindu marriage ceremony. The *Pāṇigrahaṇa* or the groom taking hold of the bride's hand

symbolises the new bond. The bridegroom takes the right hand of the bride with "I take thy hand for the sake of happiness, that thou mayest live to old age with me, thy husband". The marriage is not a mere social contract but it is a religious institution, a sacrament. This religious significance in man-woman relationship makes them responsible not only to each other but also to divine power. As indicating the union of hearts, the groom says, "I take your heart into mine, your mind shall live in mine, you shall rejoice with your heart in my word, may God join you with me." At the offer of grains of the fire, the bride says—"May my husband live long and my relations prosper. May these grains bring prosperity to us." The rite of the *Saptapadī* (seven steps) or *Saptaphere* (seven rounds) is considered most important in the marriage rituals. This rite symbolises the couple's desire to strive in unity to achieve prosperity and happiness. A prayer to the Almighty follows in the end. The couple pray to God to grant them with the strength and integrity to fulfil social and religious responsibilities, share their prosperity, be united in sharing each other's happiness as well as sorrows, be loyal to each other in body and mind, be associates in the worship of God and in practising *Dharma* as well as in *Artha* (worldly prosperity), *Kāma* (fulfilment of desires) and ultimately *Mokṣa* (salvation of soul).

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The conjugal pleasure is not confined to the mutual love of the wife and husband. The single minded affection and sympathetic love is the real conjugal happiness. The greatest *Dharma* of a woman is pativratahood.

* * * *

For a Hindu lady the only deity is her husband. All other societies in this respect are inferior to the Hindu society.

—*Rishi Bankimachandra*



Rādhā—the pathos of separation

Yathā Vrajagopikānām

(A Muslim's Śrī Rādhā)

—Raihana Tyabji

Some days ago I received a request—nay, I might say a command—from Mahārāja Śrī Prabhu Dattajī Brahmacārī to write something about Śrī Rādhā. I was horrified. I know nothing whatever about Śrī Rādhā. I do not know *Saṁskṛta*; I have read no Indian scriptures save Śrī Gītājī in the translation; I have no chance of meeting anyone who might give me any authoritative knowledge about Her, and, I am sure, am too ignorant to understand the matter even if it were explained to me. Without knowledge, *Bhakti*, learning or experience, who am I to write on such a deep and mystic subject, and what am I to write? Nevertheless, my deep love and reverence for Śrī Mahārāja will not allow me to refuse him anything he might do me the honour to ask of me. In all humility of spirit, therefore, I pray that He, who has sent me this command through Śrī Mahārāja, will give me also the strength to fulfil it. Whatever I write must, of necessity, be written in a detached way, as (although I do not like to say it) an outsider; my thoughts and impressions must be individual and personal, and I can claim no authority for what I think and write—neither that of the *Vedas* and the *Purāṇas*, nor that of a *Guru*. This is one of the reasons why I have called this article "A Muslim's Śrī Rādhā."

"A Muslim's Śrī Rādhā." to the unthinking and the superficial, this might sound contradictory, if not absurd. Neverthless, what can be more natural, indeed more inevitable, than that Śrī Rādhā should belong, in a peculiarly tender and intimate way, to Muslims? A Muslim is one who has accepted Islam, and Islam

means utter submission and self-surrender to the Lord. Nowhere, so far as I am aware, is it said in the *Quran* that to be a 'Muslim' one must be born in a 'Mussalman' family. One who loves the Lord, obeys all His commands, follows the prescribed paths; who has faith in all His apostles and makes no distinctions between them, and who submits himself completely into the Hands of the Lord or who, at any rate, tries sincerely to do all these things—is a Muslim. By this rule, Śrī Rādhā may be looked upon as a most perfect ideal and example for all Muslims, for She is *Bhakti* and Self-surrender incarnate. To say "A Muslim's Śrī Rādhā," therefore, is to give a great part of my conception of Her and Her place in Śrī Kṛṣṇa's *Līlā*, in a sentence.

How have I come by this conception? I have heard and read many and most puzzlingly conflicting reports about Her. I have no means of knowing which are true and which false; which arise from ignorance, which through enmity, which through mere poetic fancy, and which through true knowledge or experience. My only guide in this labyrinth of clashing opinions must be my love for Śrī Kṛṣṇa (such as it is), and my faith in Him. Meagre qualifications? May be—but I am not daunted, nevertheless. For I feel that love and faith may be no bad guides to the blessed feet of Śrī Rādhā. Is She not Herself the incarnation of Love and faith? Had She been a mere intellectual conception, a mystic abstraction, a focus for the glowing art of poets, or a problem for scholars to rack their brains over, I should never have dared even to think of Her. But Śrī Rādhā being Śrī Rādhā, I venture to think that a loving heart might approach Her, unhindered even by an utterly ignorant mind.

What then, have I heard about Her?

(1) Śrī Rādhā was the principal *Gopī* in Brindaban.

(2) Śrī Rādhā is a symbolical myth, born of the mystic fancy of pet-sages.

(3) Śrī Rādhā was the greatest *Bhakta* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

(4) Śrī Rādhā was an immoral young milkmaid who,

enamoured of the beauty of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, thought nothing whatever of disregarding all the laws of chastity and womanliness, and calmly and consistently deceived and betrayed her husband.

(5) Śrī Rādhā had no husband.

(6) Śrī Rādhā was the *Guru* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

(7) Śrī Rādhā was a vain, capricious coquette, who enslaved Śrī Kṛṣṇa with Her beauty and led Him a dance as undignified as it was un-divine.

(8) Śrī Rādhā was the *Śakti* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and lastly,

(9) There are many students of modern psychology who would have no hesitation whatever in saying that Śrī Rādhā was a perfect and pitiable example of a woman driven utterly hysterical by an uncontrollable and unfortunate passion.

Let us take the criticism first—

Is Śrī Rādhā a symbolical myth? If so, the *Gopīs* also must be taken to be symbolical myths, and the Brindaban *Līlā* then turns into a mere allegory. Then what becomes of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, of the *Śrīmad Bhāgvata*, of the *Mahābhārata*, and of the ancient prophecy (or prophesies) regarding Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His *Līlā*? With the falsification of Śrī Rādhā, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and all the glorious philosophy built up about Him crumble into mystical dust. And are we then to suppose that all the *Bhaktas*, past and present, suffered from folly and delusion, and that their glowing and transforming experiences of a living, loving Kṛṣṇa were but the dreams of opium-eaters? No. Neither my heart nor my brain will accept this hypothesis. I reject it, therefore. I believe that Śrī Rādhā is living and real.

Was Śrī Rādhā an immoral young milkmaid, merely, lost to all senses of purity, shame and self-respect? No. No. Impossible! Had she been such a one, how would she have achieved oneness with Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the first instance? Śrī Kṛṣṇa is divine, and only the pure in heart may attain Him. Śrī Kṛṣṇa came to uplift humanity, not to degrade it. To enter that holy presence is to be cleansed of all weakness and impurity. Desire

and passion are movements of the lower nature. What place is there for the lower nature in one who has attained nearness to the very Highest? In short, this notion of Śrī Rādhā strikes me as the most loathsome type of blasphemy, for to believe Śrī Rādhā weak is to strip Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself of divinity. Saints, sages and *Bhaktas* of all grades worship Śrī Rādhā as the very goal of spiritual effort. Could they hold Her up as an example if She were less than the very Highest? Yes, it might be argued, they might—in order to whitewash Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Since my heart rejects the idea of Śrī Kṛṣṇa needing any 'white washing' (if He did, He would not be Śrī Kṛṣṇa) this whole argument appears to me not only frivolous but poisonous. I will have none of it.

As to 'betraying' and 'deceiving' Her Husband, the thing seems on the face of it ridiculous. No *Bhakta* can ever betray or deceive anyone. It is utterly against spiritual psychology.

Śrī Rādhā was unmarried. I do not feel it matters at all whether Śrī Rādhā had a husband or not. But if She had, I am certain that She must have been a perfect wife. For what is the use of spirituality if it does not enable one to perform all one's duties in the best possible way? If, on the other hand, She had risen to such spiritual heights as to be above all ordinary duties and responsibilities, the question does not arise.

Śrī Rādhā was a vain, capricious flirt, and Śrī Kṛṣṇa a moral weakling, apt to lose his head over every pretty face! What a wonderful idea! And yet this is the kind of opinion I have heard people express in all seriousness, most often by implication, hints and innuendos. I can only say that if this is their opinion of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the sooner they stop taking His name the better, for their tongues are not fit to utter it. It is better to keep silent than utter such degrading folly.

And now the last—Śrī Rādhā was a sense-maddened hysteric! I would pass this over with a laugh, if I were not concious of the hold this pernicious idea is getting over modern

minds that spiritual *Bhāvas* are nothing but a form of hysteria. Nevertheless I do not know how it is to be combated. Those who have never experienced these ecstasies and exaltations cannot possibly discern the difference between them and outbursts of nervous disorders, (in many cases the outward symptoms of both bear a startling resemblance),—while those who, through personal experience, have come to understand the difference, cannot possibly explain it. It is a thing that can only be experienced, never explained in words or understood by the intellect. Argument and discussion, therefore, are useless, as we have found ourselves when confronted with the widespread idea that Lord Muhammad was an epileptic! It is as impossible for me, however, to believe that Śrī Rādhā was as 'hysteric' as that our Blessed Prophet was an epileptic. On the other hand, I cannot help saying here as I have often enough said before to clever sceptics—that if hysteria or epilepsy can turn one into a saint or a prophet, why, the more one suffers from either, or both, of them the better! Let us all, for God's sake, turn into hysterics and epileptics, and end at a stroke, and forever, this vicious circle of light and darkness, of knowledge and ignorance, of pain and pleasure, of delusive hopes and corrosive despairs!

And now we come to the illuminated side of the picture. Śrī Rādhā was the greatest *Bhakta* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, undoubtedly. My heart accepts that without the least hesitation.

Śrī Rādhā was the *Guru* of Kṛṣṇa. Now, here is an intriguing idea! I ask myself—is this possible? Had Śrī Kṛṣṇa anything to learn? Had Śrī Rādhā anything to teach? And if so, what? One thing and one thing only, occurs to me, and that one thing the most important, since without it the complete union of the soul with the oversoul becomes impossible. And that one thing is *Bhakti*. *Bhagavān*, being *Bhagavān*, must lack *Bhakti*, since what power, higher than Himself, can inspire it in Him? And yet, He elects to be the *Bhakta* of His *Bhaktas*—the greatest and first of all *Bhaktas!* He must learn *Bhakti* then. And from whom is

He to learn it if not from His *Bhaktas*? They alone can impart this thing to Him—the only thing they possess! Śrī Rādhā, the greatest of His *Bhaktas*, was alone fit to teach Him the lesson of *Bhakti*—of utter and ecstatic self-surrender. She first gave herself wholly, and then got Him—the one alone and immaculate! She first renounced all power, and then conquered Him—the Almighty, the invincible, the unconquerable! She ceased to be herself, and became Kṛṣṇa—where upon Kṛṣṇa automatically became Rādhā also—the very soul animating her body! Indeed, indeed, who, who more fit than Rādhā to become the *Guru* of Kṛṣṇa—and therefore of all creation? Is it not perfectly right and proper, then, that She who voluntarily became less than a speck of dust should have achieved a rank of such dizzy height as to have Her name not only coupled with Śrī Kṛṣṇa's, but even uttered before His? It is always Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, never Kṛṣṇa Rādhā. Yes, the *Guru* must come first, the *Śiṣya* after.

And lastly, Śrī Rādhā is the *Śaktī* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. This is a conception difficult for an ordinary Mussalman mind to understand, I think. I have tried to understand it, but been either puzzled or dissatisfied—frequently both. Does it mean that Śrī Rādhā is merely an incarnation of some power of the Lord, and not a human being in Her own right? This leaves my heart unsatisfied. She immediately becomes so superhuman as to be positively unhuman! She is not only divine—She is too divine! I can admire Her, I can stand in awe of Her, but I cannot feel with Her any link of humanity, any bond of human intimate love. She becomes for me a beautiful shadow. She is no longer a woman—not even the most perfect woman. This cannot satisfy me, for I am not an advanced mystic—and yet I dare to long for Śrī Rādhā and to want Her now, even now, while I am weak and ignorant and gross, and with no visible hope of ever being better. Let Her be my ideal, but let Her be a warm, living, breathing, loving ideal! Let Her be divine enough to inspire and uplift me, but not too divine to be utterly and for ever beyond my grasp!

My heart has spoken. Shall I listen to it? Shall I comfort it by believing that Śrī Rādhā was, after all, flesh and blood, bonafide human being only, one who had reached the highest stage of spiritual attainment? Shall I think Her a link between *Bhagavān* and His *Bhaktas*, partaking at once of His divinity and their humanity? Dare I think of Her as a bond between the creator and His creatures, drawing Him down to them, pulling them up to Him? What an attractive, what a satisfying idea.

But hush! Something speaks within me. Something that is deeper than the intellect, subtler than the imagination. It must be heard, for it seems to speak with authority. 'Pause', it says and think. Thou hast come thus far—now go farther. Think of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and think of His *Līlā*, and remember that Śrī Rādhā was His partner in that *Līlā*! Kṛṣṇa is divine; His *Līlā* is divine, can His partner be an ordinary mortal? Can she, indeed, be a 'mortal' at all? No, it is true. Strange, new ideas come into my mind. Brindaban takes on an unearthly beauty; the moon shines with a splendour that is more a glow of spirit than the illumination of matter; the dancing *Gopīs*—what and who are they? Why are they transparent, translucent and formed like humans, yet of an ethereal substance that has nothing in common with human clay? and Śrī Rādhā!..........

Through the clamour of my emotions I catch a glimpse of something beyond all power of description. Something so magnificent, so breathtakingly gorgeous, that the mind reels, the breath stops, language herself is stricken dumb. Great meanings flash into my mind......

But enough. I can say no more. Śrī Rādhā may be anything. It has ceased to matter. I only know that She is utterly divine and utterly adorable. My head bows before Her. My hands fold themselves before Her. My whole being salutes Her in utmost reverence and love.

Jai Śrī Rādhā ! Jai Śrī Rādhā Kṛṣṇa

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Analysis of the Status of Women in the Interactions of Tradition and Modernity

—Mridula Jha Bideh and B. D. Jha Bideh

Women have been placed at the highest position to be worshipped and not to be equated. They have been seeing the humanity and relegated self to the background. Concentrating on the reality of life they have been inculcating the indomitable spirit of defying and then conquering the defeat where as the intruding hybrid life styles and values the women as if they are defeated in the race.

Earth cannot be given a room on the earth to accommodate. Similarly the society cannot fulfil the claim if at all made by the women what they deserve to get.

It is a matter of pride that the traditional Indian culture and religious base have been conferring the woman a very high status. Numerous economic, social, legal, political and other environmental forces had been interacting with our religion and cultural value system in order to effect and achieve a different profile for women who have been honoured as *Mātṛśakti* or *Devī* in our age-old, well proven, flexible, traditional and religious bases. Materialistic excitation in the present day thoughts compels the ethical and moral values to attain a different philosophy and meaning of life to the individual specially in respect of women.

Behaviour and role pattern of women are also changing within the family. Ladies are going out for office/factory assignments or for other formal organisational jobs at the cost of informal sacrifice in the family and society. Individuality has predominated over femininity in most of the cases.

In the evening both husband and wife come to house from different work locations of formal organisations with different types of experiences and the feelings. Both of them are tired and expect some help from each other psychologically. Incipient symptoms of stress are not only in husband but in wife as well. These may be due to different working conditions, different working hours, different environment and work-culture and lastly different types of difficulties faced by the couple to reach the job locations. This has reduced the conjugal conversations and most of the times the birth of extra marital affairs specially in the working women and in the males with their co-worker etc., are emerging due to this effect. This is a very critical junction. We have three options to decide. first—whether we should go back for proven traditional values and cultural norms, second—whether we should proceed towards the so-called modern culture and lastly to optimise the interactions between modernity and the tradition amicably so that the age old values may get survived, modified slowly in accordance with the demand of the time and may flourish with the better pace of development at the same time.

Lot of pleasure, comforts and glamour is seen apparently on the surface, but facts may not be so in the case of modern style of living. It is becoming extremely difficult for women to remain associated with the traditional cultural stream at this pace of increasing global pressure, interactions, materialistic values and thinking for liberalisation.

Concept of *Sva* or individuality is just like *Bhikṣā* and the concept of *Mātṛśakti* or femininity is just like *Dāna*. For healthy ongoing survival and growth of family institution *Strītva* in women is a must. Lack of confidence, belief, trust, emotional stability and various personality defects in child due to less association with mother cannot be procured for any amount of money. This is a social and national loss. At the same time the supporters of woman-force in formal organisation says that

the woman-resource is a vital link for the national development through the referred path.

The personality of women as defined and depicted through the advertisement and other cheaper media of communication is of machiavellian, vicious and sexually aggressive whereas the fact is far beyond this. The concept of femininity was virtuous, self sacrificing mothers and loving daughters.

This rootless globally 'Hai' culture has given a self styled definition of the social values as suits them. Such acts of immediate benefit may not have the enduring positive effects for individual himself as well as for the society as a whole. The drive is for material achievement at any cost including at the cost of moral and ethical values.

Earlier some difference of opinion between wife and husband used to take place after sufficiently longer period of marriage. Marriage had been keeping enriched component of sacraments and very limited scope of contract. Now due to rising trends of the contract components in the marital relationship not only the difference of opinion but the legal separation or complete destruction of the pious family institution takes place as early as within a year or so after the marriage. Root cause for these are the lagging component of intellectuality like adaptability, understanding and mutuality.

The population of commanding wives are increasing more in our social structure due to inclusion of more industrial atmosphere within the family. Though to achieve any goal in the industrial pursuit wife in this category helps a lot but stretching beyond the capability of the individual has led the increasing cases of middle age maladies like heart attacks, strokes and kidney failure.

Present politicians and the people with very selfish motives also started encasing the terms like 'Women' and 'Equality' without analysing in depth. It is common feeling of the individual that one rates the jobs done by the others as more

easy, comfortable and lucrative unless he analyses in detail, however when the same job is assigned to him the response changes. Hence it is the need of the time to enhance the understanding component in men in respect of women and to reassess the role of women in the family institution. A scholarly mother can provide tremendous inputs for the development of the whole family than what she can try to compensate by real economic earning by her.

Times and again the quotes are written depicting the texts referring some religious books in respect of the degradation of women. I would like to request the writers that they should first attain the thorough concept in respects of the referred text before throwing the same in distorted form to the readers. The degree of acceptance of liberal form of *Strītva* in Hindu religion is of the highest order. Though the concept like *Pati Parameśvara* is also in existence and on that basis the existence of the neutral wives and her identification in the society but the same can not be generalised.

Woman is and always would have been superior to their complements. They are originators. They are the objective form of supreme sacrifice. They are to be worshipped and not to be confined in the limitations of the 'equality'. They are at the peak of their duties. Let us revive our ideology and save the diminishing values for the women by modernity.

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When a wife regards her husband as God, when such thoughts and such currents tend to make her husband God, will not her mental energy, her force directed in this way, make her husband God ? Will it not help the husband in realizing his own true Self to be God ? Most certainly.

—*Swami Rama Tirtha*

Mother—An Adorable Deity

—Prof. Purna Chandra Ojha

गुरुर्माता गुरुः पिता गुरुदेवः पुरोहितः।
धुर्वहोऽपि गुरुः प्रोक्तः गुरुः शिष्यादिकारकः॥

Mother, like others, as mentioned in the above verse, is called the preceptor (गुरु) out and out. She is in one the preceptor, the teacher, the heavy (glorious), the great and the very woman who deserves respect in all respects as the word 'गुरु' means after being derived from the root 'गॄ' suffixed with 'कु' (गुरुः √गॄ+कु) in *Saṁskṛta*.

Mother is said to be the best preceptor or the best teacher. Home is her field of work which is called the first school, where mother is called the first teacher. A child from its very birth depends only upon its mother and not on father. Father comes after mother. Not only in case of human beings but also in case of all animal beings. A child can learn everything from its mother rather than others. From mother it can learn to talk first and better. Therefore, only to honour her, we name our own language as mother-tongue (मातृभाषा). It is mother who moulds rightly or wrongly the character of her child. She feeds the child with her breast and through that kind of feeding she infuses the vices or virtues in her child. The teachings imparted by mother whether good or bad at this stage become a part and parcel of its being. So it is said—

"Through mother's faults a child is lost,
The mother's lapse maketh its life accursed."

Again—

"It is mother's skill that easily can,

Build up a child to be a man."

The great Indian heroes like Śivājī, Netājī, Bāpūjī and others alike grew into superior men partly because of their religious minded mothers. Really the hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world. Only mothers can make good citizens, but they should be physically, intellectually and spiritually sound. So it is said—

"Strength of mothers nation's
Strength engenders,
Nation is weak if
Weak are mothers."

Again—

"It is men that forgeth a nation's fate,
It is mothers who these men beget."

To maintain a family, money is badly needed. It is the duty of a father to bear this responsibility, but the home having a good mother can never fall a victim to economic crisis. To strengthen this view Prof. Yaśa Pāla Simha says—"As the source of the administration of a nation depends upon her Home and Finance departments, so does the happiness of a family depend upon the all-sided efficiency of the mother." Similarly discipline is quite indispensable for a family to run well. The nation is groaning as a whole under the wheels of indiscipline among the youths. Mothers to a very great extent, are responsible for this state of affairs. If mothers become conscious of their responsibilities towards their children and the nation, the problem of indiscipline can be solved in no time.

It will not be out of place here, to discuss—Who is that woman to hold the befitting place of mother. What does the word 'Mother' mean ? Mother is a very sacrosanct word which means, according to *Random House Dictionary*—"A woman in control or authority; something that gives origin or rise to something else." Mother is what the sun is. Mother is lauded

by all irrespective of caste, creed and religion like the sun because both of them possess the same quality as from them everything originates; so to say the universe. So 'सविता' and 'सूर्य' are the justified names given by our forefathers to the sun. Sun means the creator or the originator. Similarly, there are a number of synonym words found in *Saṁskṛta* given to Mother like 'जननी, प्रसूः, जनयित्री, प्रसवित्री, प्रसविनी, जनी, सुतिनी etc'.

Mother is the image of the earth; the earth herself—"माता भूमिः पुत्रोऽहं पृथिव्याः" Hence Manu, the law-maker of Hindu religion says—

आचार्यो ब्रह्मणो मूर्त्तिः पिता मूर्त्तिः प्रजापतेः।
माता पृथिव्या मूर्त्तिस्तु भ्राता च मूर्त्तिरात्मनः॥

An anonymous American poet says that Mother is in one—

"A radiant nurse whose very voice and presence bring strength to the beside of a sick child.

An angel of mercy bandaging the cut finger of her dirty faced boy.

A patient teacher reading adventure tales to her tiny tots.

A watchful guardian waiting well past midnight for her boy or girl to come home.

A compassionate attorney with dad not to punish her child too severely.

A fountain head of courage whose hand in the dark quiets all fears........"

If we discuss more and more, then we can come to the conclusion that the mother is above all the best preceptor or the best teacher, who is in one a friend, philosopher and a guide to her tots like taughts. So like teacher she deserves respect. Among the human beings, she is the holiest of all since she plays a vital role in the making of a mighty nation. In all religions, cultures, countries and communities of the world, mother is considered venerable. Every woman after being a mother rises in esteem and commands universal respect, and only for this every woman aspires to be a mother. Mother is

always as sacred as the holy water of the river Ganges, and she is greater than the heaven. So Lord Rāma thus advising his brother Lakṣmaṇa says in *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*—

अपि स्वर्णमयी लंका न मे लक्ष्मण रोचते।
जननी जन्मभूमिश्च स्वर्गादपि गरीयसी॥

In *Manusmṛti* it is said that the mother (माता), the father (पिता) and the preceptor (आचार्य) are called as the three worlds (भूः, भुवः and स्वः), three *Āśramas* (ब्रह्मचर्याश्रम, गार्हस्थ्याश्रम, वानप्रस्थाश्रम), three *Vedas* (ऋक्, यजुः, साम) and the three fires (गार्हपत्य, दाक्षिण, आहवनीय). So it is said—

त एव हि त्रयो लोकास्त एव त्रय आश्रमाः।
त एव हि त्रयो वेदास्त एवोक्तास्त्रयोऽग्नयः॥

Mother has always been praised and lauded. The glory of mother is indescribable. Her place is high. She is peerless and incomparable. She is more respectable than the teacher, preceptor, father and even than the God. So it is said—

उपाध्यायान्दशाचार्य आचार्याणां शतं पिता।
सहस्त्रं तु पितृन्माता गौरवेणातिरिच्यते॥

Regarding the glory of mother it has been unanimously sung by our ancestors as— 'मातृदेवो भव', 'नास्ति मातृसमो गुरुः', 'माता परं दैवतम्', 'माता गुरुतरा भूमेः', 'स्वर्गादुच्चतरः पिता' 'भूमेर्गरीयसी माता' etc.

The compassion kindness and grace of mother is great. So it is said—"मातृकृपा हि केवलम्". The blessings of mother remain always with her child and due to this her child gains anything else which is impossible for a common man to get. Garuḍa, the king of birds, due to the blessings of his mother, could be able to bring nectar from heaven defeating the denizens of the heaven and even Viṣṇu and Indra, the lord of Gods were defeated by him.

The place and position of mother in home is supreme. No one has got the virtue and sense of dedication enough to supersede her. The loss of father be compensated to some extent but the loss of mother is irreparable out and out. Father comes after mother. While going to pray 'पार्वती' and 'शिव', the mother

and father of this universe, Kālidāsa the lord of poets of *Saṁskṛta* literature has implored them so markedly in his world famous work *Raghuvaṁśam* in a manner where mother Pārvatī comes first then Śiva, the father of the universe. So he said—

वागर्थाविव सम्पृक्तौ वागर्थप्रतिपत्तये।
जगतः पितरौ वन्दे पार्वतीपरमेश्वरौ॥

Here 'पितरौ' is a compounding word consisting of two words where mother 'माता' comes first and then the father (पिता)= (माता च पिता च पितरौ). Similarly in 'पार्वतीपरमेश्वरौ' the word 'परमेश्वर' follows 'पार्वती' and in 'वागर्थौ', 'अर्थ' comes after 'वाक्'.

A mother is always in our heart, wherever we may go. She is part of everything that we do. That's why we love her so. A mother, by no means becomes ill towards her children whatever the case may be. So 'जगद्गुरु शङ्कराचार्य' says—"कुपुत्रो जायेत क्वचिदपि कुमाता न भवति."

On an occasion, Washington Irving remarked nicely on Mother as—

"A father may turn his back on his child; brothers and sisters may become inveterate enemies; husbands may desert their wives and wives their husbands, but a mother's love endures through all; in good repute, in bad repute in the face of the world's condemnation, a mother still loves on, and still hopes that her child may turn from his evil ways, and repent, still she remembers the infant smiles that once filled her bosom with rapture, the merry laugh, the joyful shout of his childhood, the opening promise of his youth, and she can never be brought to think him at all unworthy."

In fact, mother needs no monuments of granite to commemorate her; for she lives forever in almost everyone's heart. The pain that mother bears for her child cannot be paid off by any means trying even for thousands and thousands of years on the earth. So Manu has said—

यं मातापितरौ क्लेशं सहेते सम्भवे नृणाम्।
न तस्य निष्कृतिः शक्या कर्तुं वर्षशतैरपि॥

Service to mother and father is service to God. If both of them are pleased, God is pleased. For him, there is no need of practising any penance, fasting or vows if anyone serves his parents and his teacher mindfully and altruistically. So it is said—

तयोर्नित्यं प्रियं कुर्यादाचार्यस्य च सर्वदा।
तेष्वेव त्रिषु तुष्टेषु तपः सर्वं समाप्यते॥

Mother's presence is quite felt in home. Really she is our preceptor. She is the indicating stick for the blind men like us. She canes up like a teacher in our childhood to mend and mould our character and to make us great. She canes us only for our betterment as the potter strikes his clay pots to have their better shape. She is as important in home as the soul in the human body. She is always a source of light and delight, consolation and compassion, health and happiness. Without mother the existence of a child is doubtful. So a saying prevails in Oriyā as—

मा नाहिं याहार नाम नाहिं ताहार।

(Having no mother, having no name)

This is the fact that in this mundane world the five things are rare and valuable. They are 'जननी' (the mother), 'जन्मभूमि' (the motherland),'जाह्नवी' (the ganges), 'जनार्दन' (the God Janārdana) and 'जनक' (the father). So it is said—

जननी जन्मभूमिश्च जाह्नवी च जनार्दनः।
जनकः पञ्चमश्चैव जकाराः पञ्च दुर्लभाः॥

There is nothing great and sacred than the mother. If we want to make our home a heaven, let us obey, love, respect and adore our beloved mother.

Let God bless our Mother
And mother bless our Home.

Prayers—

Śrī Sūkta

Vedic—

गन्धद्वारां दुराधर्षां नित्यपुष्टां करीषिणीम्।
ईश्वरीं सर्वभूतानां तामिहोप ह्वये श्रियम्॥

"I hereby invoke the Goddess Śrī who is full of fragrance, who cannot be suppressed or subjugated by anybody in anyway, who is always accompanied by all sorts of prosperity, who always inhances the livestock of devotees, who is the controller of all beings right from the Brahmā at the top to a grass leaf at the bottom. I invoke the such Goddess in my home."

मनसः काममाकूतिं वाचः सत्यमशीमहि।
पशूनां रूपमन्नस्य मयि श्रीः श्रयतां यशः॥

"Let the Goddess Śrī take abode in my person who may fulfil all my desires—mundane and spiritual, secular or otherworldly—who may materialise my utterances in their fulness and who may bestow upon me the prosperity of livestock and foodgrains and fame."

कर्दमेन प्रजा भूता मयि संभव कर्दम।
श्रियं वासय मे कुले मातरं पद्ममालिनीम्॥

"O Kardama, who are the son of Śrī Devī, take your abode in my house. Kindly motivate your mother Śrī Devī who wears a lovely garland of lotus flowers to remain in my house."

आपः सृजन्तु स्निग्धानि चिक्लीत वस मे गृहे।
निचदेवीं मातरं श्रियं वासय मे कुले॥

"Let the gods presiding over the waters, be pleased to provide the curd, ghee and other oily substances. O Ciklīta, the best among the sons of Lakṣmī, you also please take your abode and motivate your mother Lakṣmī to reside in my family."

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Atharvaśīrṣa

अहं ब्रह्मस्वरूपिणी। मत्तः प्रकृतिपुरुषात्मकं जगत्। शून्यं चाशून्यं च॥

"I am verily the *Brahma*. It is from me that the entire universe—a combination of *Prakṛti* and *Puruṣa*, existent and non-existent, emanated."

अहमानन्दानानन्दौ। अहं विज्ञानाविज्ञाने। अहं ब्रह्माब्रह्मणी वेदितव्ये। अहं पञ्चभूतान्यपञ्चभूतानि। अहमखिलं जगत्॥

"I am the bliss and sorrow both embodied. I am verily the knowledge and ignorance embodied. I am verily the *Brahma* and non-*Brahma* (if there is any) worth knowing. I am the five elements and whatever is above and apart from them."

वेदोऽहमवेदोऽहम्। विद्याहमविद्याहम्। अजाहमनजाहम्। अधश्चोर्ध्वं च तिर्यक्चाहम्॥

"I am the *Vedas* and also above them. I am spiritual knowledge and inertia both. I am birthless and transcendental to whatever is born. I am vertical, transcendental and horizontal."

अहं रुद्रेभिर्वसुभिश्चरामि। अहमादित्यैरुत विश्वदेवैः। अहं मित्रावरुणावुभौ बिभर्मि। अहमिन्द्राग्नी अहमश्विनावुभौ॥

"I move around alongwith and in the form of Rudras and Vasus. I move alongwith Ādityas and Viśvedevas. I sustain Mitra and Varuṇa both. I sustain Indra and fire-god. I sustain the two Aśvins."

अहं सोमं त्वष्टारं पूषणं भगं दधामि। अहं विष्णुमुरुक्रमं ब्रह्माणमुत प्रजापतिं दधामि॥

"I hold the deities like Soma, Twaṣṭā, Pūṣā and Bhaga. It is I, who hold Viṣṇu—the one capable of covering the three worlds with his three strides—Brahmā and Prajāpati."

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Puranic—

Praises Offered by Gods

दुर्गे स्मृता हरसि भीतिमशेषजन्तोः
स्वस्थैः स्मृता मतिमतीव शुभां ददासि।
दारिद्र्यदुःखभयहारिणि का त्वदन्या
सर्वोपकारकरणाय सदाऽऽर्द्रचित्ता॥

"O Mother Goddess, if remembered with devotion You remove all causes of fear of everybody; remembered by hail and hearty ones, You bestow upon them an auspicious and untainted intellect. Oh one, who annihilates all sorts of poverty, misery, and fear, who else other than You has a heart always melting to do good to all Her devotees."

दुर्वृत्तवृत्तशमनं तव देवि शीलं
रूपं तथैतदविचिन्त्यमतुल्यमन्यैः।
वीर्यं च हन्तृ हृतदेवपराक्रमाणां
वैरिष्वपि प्रकटितैव दया त्वयेत्थम्॥

"O Goddess, Your nature and character is that of suppressing the evil activities of the wicked and Your form is beyond the grasp of contemplation and without parallel. Your valour is capable of destroying even those demons who sometimes back had defeated all the gods and made their efforts futile. This way (by killing them) You bestow Your mercy even upon Your enemy."

देवि प्रपन्नार्तिहरे प्रसीद
प्रसीद मातर्जगतोऽखिलस्य।
प्रसीद विश्वेश्वरि पाहि विश्वं
त्वमीश्वरी देवि चराचरस्य॥

"O Goddess, You always remove the troubles of those who take refuge in You. Kindly get pleased O Mother of the whole

universe. Please, O controller of the universe, protect the world. You are the mistress of all beings mobile and immobile."

आधारभूता जगतस्त्वमेका
महीस्वरूपेण यतः स्थितासि।
अपां स्वरूपस्थितया त्वयैत-
दाप्यायते कृत्स्नमलङ्घ्यवीर्ये॥

"You are the only base and substratum to the world in the form of the earth. Your valour is invincible. You alone quench the thirst of all the worlds in the form of waters."

विद्याः समस्तास्तव देवि भेदाः
स्त्रियः समस्ताः सकला जगत्सु।
त्वयैकया पूरितमम्बयैतत्
का ते स्तुतिः स्तव्यपरा परोक्तिः॥

"O Mother Goddess, all branches of knowledge (secular or spiritual) are only Your different aspects. All feminine beings are Your different images. The whole universe is pervaded by You and You alone. You are beyond the ken of eulogising and praising. You are the Supreme Sound."

सृष्टिस्थितिविनाशानां शक्तिभूते सनातनि।
गुणाश्रये गुणमये नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते॥

"O Nārāyaṇī, my obeisance to You, who are the supreme Energy causing the creation, sustenance and annihilation, O Eternal Goddess, the base of all the three modes of nature, embodying all the three modes."

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Classical—

Devyaparādhakṣamāpanam

(Prayer Offered by Śaṅkarācārya, the Great)

विधेरज्ञानेन द्रविणविरहेणालसतया
विधेयाशक्यत्वात्तव चरणयोर्या च्युतिरभूत्।
तदेतत्क्षन्तव्यं जननि सकलोद्धारिणि शिवे
कुपुत्रो जायेत क्वचिदपि कुमाता न भवति॥

"O Mother, the liberator of all, I do not know the proper manner of worship; do not possess sufficient money to offer; I am lethargic by nature and the job of propitiating you is almost impossible to me. Therefore, there might have occurred slips and omissions in performing your worship. Being a mother, you should forgive all my drawbacks because the sons may be unworthy and wayward but not the mother."

पृथिव्यां पुत्रास्ते जननि बहवः सन्ति सरलाः
परं तेषां मध्ये विरलतरलोऽहं तव सुतः।
मदीयोऽयं त्यागः समुचितमिदं नो तव शिवे
कुपुत्रो जायेत क्वचिदपि कुमाता न भवति॥

"On the surface of this earth, O Mother there may be many sons of yours simple, gentle and straightforward but I am one among the exceptionally naughty children. O Śivā, it is not at all proper on your part, to abandon me like this because a son may be unworthy and spoiled but nowhere the mother."

जगन्मातर्मातस्तव चरणसेवा न रचिता
न वा दत्तं देवि द्रविणमपि भूयस्तव मया।
तथापि त्वं स्नेहं मयि निरुपमं यत्प्रकुरुषे
कुपुत्रो जायेत क्वचिदपि कुमाता न भवति॥

"O Mother of universe, I could not render any services to Your sacred feet nor could I offer any amount of money to you.

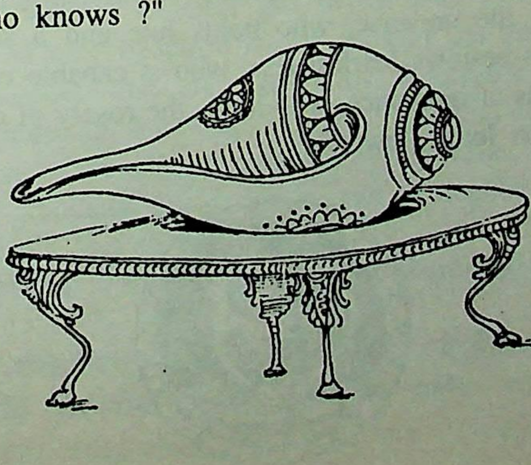
Still you hold, such a motherly affection unique of its kind, on me. It is because the child may be unworthy but not the mother."

परित्यक्ता देवा विविधविधिसेवाकुलतया
मया पञ्चाशीतेरधिकमपनीते तु वयसि।
इदानीं चेन्मातस्तव यदि कृपा नापि भविता
निरालम्बो लम्बोदरजननि कं यामि शरणम्॥

"Now at this old age of 85, I have given up worshipping all other gods because their worship requires a rigid stereotyped method and different sorts of paraphernalia. If You abandon me and I am devoid of Your grace. O Mother of Lord Gaṇeśa, to whom shall I approach and seek shelter, being helpless and supportless as I am."

श्वपाको जल्पाको भवति मधुपाकोपमगिरा
निरातङ्को रङ्को विहरति चिरं कोटिकनकैः।
तवापर्णे कर्णे विशति मनुवर्णे फलमिदं
जनः को जानीते जननि जपनीयं जपविधौ॥

"O Aparṇā, even if a single syllable of Your *Mantra* falls in the ear of an illitrate pariah he becomes a sweet speaker and a pauper becomes master of unthinkable wealth. Contrary to this if a person does perform the *Japa* of Your *Mantra* intentionally following all rules and regulations; what result will he get, who knows ?"



Sarasvatī Stotram

या कुन्देन्दुतुषारहारधवला या शुभ्रवस्त्रावृता
या वीणावरदण्डमण्डितकरा या श्वेतपद्मासना।
या ब्रह्माच्युतशङ्करप्रभृतिभिर्देवैः सदा वन्दिता
सा मां पातु सरस्वती भगवती निःशेषजाड्यापहा॥

"May the Goddess Sarasvatī protect me, who is capable of obliterating all inertia, one who is white like the *Kunda* flower, moon and the snowy necklace, one who wears snowwhite garments, one who holds the beautiful lute and who is seated on white lotus flower and who is always paid obeisance to by super gods like Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śaṅkara."

शुक्लां ब्रह्मविचारसारपरमामाद्यां जगद्व्यापिनीं
वीणापुस्तकधारिणीमभयदां जाड्यान्धकारापहाम्।
हस्ते स्फाटिकमालिकां च दधतीं पद्मासने संस्थितां
वन्दे तां परमेश्वरीं भगवतीं बुद्धिप्रदां शारदाम्॥

"I pay my obeisance to the primal Goddess Sarasvatī who is the Supreme Ruler possessing all the six divine traits, who is the giver of good intellect, who is white in appearance, who is expert in analysing the Supreme Reality Brahma, who is permeating the universe, who holds lute and a book in her hands, who bestows fearlessness, who is capable of removing the darkness of ignorance, who holds the rosary of crystals and is seated on lotus flower."



Editorial

'Better late than never', so goes the proverbial saying. The whole world observed 1975 as *Woman Year*. Since then twenty long years passed. A lot of water has flown through Ganges and the world underwent through fantastic and incredible changes during the last twenty years. The science and technology has almost changed the face of social structure and economic values. If a person of nineteenth century happens to resurrect and cast a glance over the world, it is certain that he will fail to recognise the world as in his own time. Tremendous development and unbelievable advancement has taken place but did the human beings and their instinctive feelings also undergo any change ? The psychologists like Mcdougall believe that man is a bundle of fourteen instincts and the difference between man and animal hinges on the instinct of laughter. An animal is devoid of instinct of laughter. All other thirteen instincts are common to both. Laughter ! What a valuable gift to the man from divinity ! Laughter ! What a beautiful flag to indicate the inner joy of a person ! Laughter ! that can make the lovely human faces, lovelier and more charming. But Alas ! in spite of all these developments and gadgetry conveniences, provided by the technology, man is slowly and gradually losing his instinct of laughter—a horrible and irreparable loss to the humanity.

'दृष्टिभेदाद्दर्शनभेदः' is another saying and Bhartṛhari, the noble poet says—

आहारनिद्राभयमैथुनं च सामान्यमेतत् पशुभिर्नराणाम्।
धर्मोहि तेषामधिको विशेषो धर्मेणहीनाः पशुभिः समानाः॥

"Appetite, sleep, fear and the desire of copulation—are

Dharma

equally present in man and animal. The former is differentiated from the latter on the basis of *Dharma*. Persons without the sense of *Dharma*, are verily the animals no doubt."

Just like instinct of laughter are we not loosing the sense of religiousness also ? If it is true that the sense of righteousness is diminishing, well, then what remains in us—is a million dollar question.

Once Einstein said—"Science without religion is blind and religion without science is lame." It may or may not be true but the spirit and the spirituality both are quite independent, science or no science. Of course they require religiousness to a certain extent. It may not be very correct to say that women are the only vehicle for pulling the chariot of spirituality and righteousness, but undoubtedly they are capable of creating a favourable atmosphere.

Last year we published the *Gaṇeśa Number* of The Kalyana-Kalpataru. Gaṇeśa is perhaps the only god who was created by the mother goddess Pārvatī of her own accord and without the help of her male partner. Gaṇeśa—the god of accomplishment and bounty, is a creation of a female alone—is enough to establish that if the world expects a cure for social and spiritual maladies it must look for woman. Revered Vivekānanda also very often said that the object that could be achieved with the help of five hundred men does hardly require fifty women. He assured that he could make the country free if he got a band of fifty sincere women within a few months. It was not an exaggerated statement. There is literally no limit to the female potency. So we are publishing our *Woman Number* as a special issue for the year October 1995 to September 1996. We look towards the Divine Father for the success of our undertaking. That Divine Player has been playing his delightful game from the eternity. Even the social unrest and political upheavals, the terrible hurricane and the destructive earthquake—everything is a part of His game. What a splendrous play ? The human

intelligence and wit finds itself at bay to appreciate it. Sometimes we feel happy and at other times quite dejected caused by favourable and unfavourable circumstances. But the Divine Player goes on playing quite unconcernedly. To maintain the balance what we are really required is to adjust our attitude with the Divine Designing.

We sincerely feel that this tremendous task of making and maintaining the mental equilibrium, world peace and behavioural balance we have got to solicit help from our womenfolk. The afflicted humanity requires not surgeons so much as Nightingales to nurse it and to become a solace to the decaying norms of humanity. It is only women who can inspire their menfolk to achieve the Himalayan glories and make the world more comfortable. It is women who can apply soothing ointment to the wounded heart of the society. It is women who can nurse and teach the would-be citizens of the world-state and make them persons of character and quality. But we think it will not be wrong and unwise to warn the male gentry of the world that if our women become wayward, the world does not have any hope for any good social, moral, ethical or spiritual. All of our provisions provided by science and technology mean less than nothing if our women start travelling on a wrong track. In that case the world is doomed to perish. There seems no other alternative. If the world and its members disagree to co-exist they have got to agree to co-perish.

Our learned readers, you are well aware of the fact that your magazine The Kalyana-Kalpataru is committed to fight tooth and nail against any vicious tendency that develops in society anywhere on the globe. It has got an ambition to take out the venomous fangs of the dreadful serpent of social evil to save the world from the complete destruction.

When we look to the present picture of the society with special reference to the prevailing conditions of womenfolk the situation appears to be very bleak and disheartening. The

married life and matrimonial relations are going on worsening day by day, disturbing the social equilibrium so is the case of bachelors and spinsters particularly the college going ones.

What is that thing after which everybody is dashing headlong ? Isn't it peace and comfort ? What does peace mean ? Commonly peace has got two sides—(1) Law and order (2) Mental peace.

Law and order is provided by the social or state administration. It is certainly a good thing but it is not a proper remedy for mental ailments. It is mental peace that is more important for the individual and social health. Is it possible to secure the mental peace through what we are doing ? Let us take the example of divorce cases. Is divorce the proper remedy for matrimonial peace ? Increasing number of divorce cases indicates that there is something basically wrong which cannot be repaired by changing partners. Let us face facts as they are. By avoiding them as we are doing or by conniving them we will be nowhere. If divorce is the remedy, all the divorcees must be the happiest persons, but they are not, it is a fact. We very often find that the same person changes the partner in his life more than once or in certain cases frequently. This proves that the modern rational mind of the West which we are madly imitating takes the spouses to be a mercantile commodity, just for enjoyment and nothing more. This attitude is the very weevil that eats away from within the entire personality—individual, social or national.

The root cause of this attitude is the social treatment meted out to particularly women. We have failed to assess and evaluate the potency of womenfolk how sublime they can be made and in that case they will prove to be the most valuable agents for social welfare. So we dedicate this *Woman Number* to the womanhood of the world in general and the Hindu women in particular. We feel that if society will get any ray of hope it is possible only through the spiritual sublimation of women.

Spiritual sublimation of women

Whatever movements are launched by the different organisations to fight for female independence—individual, social and economic—are bound to fail if the spirituality is neglected. The life has become so much complex these days that a man has only remained as a bundle of tensions and depressions. After the toilsome work of the day when a man reaches home he requires a soothing touch from his female partner and if he fails to get it, the life becomes a wreck.

Is the economic independence of the women real remedy for the problem ? It doesn't seem to be so. No doubt she will cease to depend on anybody else including her husband and she can supply her personal needs by herself for some time but only for some time, not permanently. We must remember it. Even after economic independence the women will require a husband—it is but natural and nobody can overrule this divine law.

Every woman craves for motherhood. That too is a divine law. And there lies the grandeur and splendour of motherhood in women and women only. No man can establish his claim for such high dignity. Fortunately in India, our sages of yore realised this fact and if one has faith in the scriptures the Hindu society has given birth to historical ladies like Anasūyā and Sāvitrī who could have literally dragged sun-god on the earth and that too without undergoing an austere penance. What is harm, if we try to motivate the womenfolk of the world in general on the path trodden by the chaste ladies like Anasūyā and Sāvitrī. The sociologists and law-makers of the world are experimenting to achieve their goal. The divorce laws are nothing but the experiment in the same direction. But we know that they could not have succeeded so far. To The Kalyana-Kalpataru there appears no harm in making another experiment on the Indian pattern of matrimonial peace. We hope that this special number will try to inspire our womenfolk to adopt the well-acquainted path trodden by their predecessor ladies.

We express our heart-felt thanks to the exalted souls who

have bestowed their blessings on your magazine. We regard their blessings most valuable for our success as they represent the divinity itself. We profusely thank to our scholarly contributors whose enlightening articles we are publishing in the magazine. We request them to extend their co-operation as usual. We are thankful to those writers also whose articles we could not publish. I, as an Editor, am thankful to the editorial staff of The Kalyana-Kalpataru without whose active co-operation this venture could not be materialised. And lastly we pay our sincere obeisance to the Lord Almighty and express our thanks who is the very source of inspiration for The Kalyana-Kalpataru to render its services within its limited approach. I must confess that the responsibility of any ommissions, commissions and shortcomings comes to my share. If the readers find some valuable things in this number, the credit goes primarily to Lord Almighty and secondarily to the readers themselves.

In the end our salutations, compliments and good wishes to all of you.

Om Śāntiḥ, Śāntiḥ, Śāntiḥ.

—*Editor*

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अरोगिणीं भ्रातृमतीमसमानार्षगोत्रजाम्।
पञ्चमात्सप्तमादूर्ध्वं मातृतः पितृतस्तथा॥

"The girl who is not susceptible to any incurable disease, not without brothers and not belonging to the same clan and family (*Gotra* and *Prawara*); who is not within the range of five generations from the mother's side and seven generations from the father's side, should be accepted as a bride to marry."

—*Yājñavalkya Smṛti* (I. 53)

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THE KALYANA-KALPATARU BUSINESS RULES

(1) **The Kalyana-Kalpataru** is published every month of the Gregorian calender. Each ordinary issue contains 64 pages of printed matter besides the title sheets and one coloured illustration. Every **October Number** is a **Special Number** dealing with some particular theme.

(2) Commercial advertisements are not accepted for publication in the magazine.

(3) Change of address should be communicated before the 15th of the previous month. Subscribers are requested to mention their number and old address when sending intimation of a change of address. Temporary change of address should be arranged with the local post office.

(4) Remittances and correspondence relating to management, subscription etc., should be addressed to the Manager. Letters connected with the publication of articles are to be addressed to the Editor.

(5) The annual subscription is payable strictly in advance. Subscribers are not enrolled for less than a year. The period of subscription is counted from **October** to **September**. Life members are not enrolled.

(6) The magazine publishes only articles that are helpful in promoting spiritual welfare. It welcomes contributions on subjects like *Bhakti*, *Jñāna* and *Vairāgya*, or biographies of saints who are no more on earth. Articles containing personal attacks or aspersion are not accepted. Only typed articles will be accepted for consideration. The editors reserve to themselves the right of curtailing or supplementing where necessary, or of publishing or withholding publication of articles. Unpublished articles are not returned unless asked for. The editors are not responsible for the statements or opinions of contributors.

The Manager,
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Kalpataru

God is like the wish-yielding tree of the celestial world (*Kalpataru*) which gives whatever one asks of it. So one should be careful to give up all worldly desires when one's mind has been purified by religious exercise. Just hear a story. A certain traveller came to a large plain in the course of his travels. As he had been walking in the sun for many hours, he was thoroughly exhausted and heavily perspiring; so he sat down in the shade of a tree to rest a little. Presently he began to think what a comfort it would be if he could but get a soft bed there to sleep on. He was not aware that he was sitting under the celestial tree. As soon as the above thought rose in his mind, he found a nice bed by his side. He felt much astonished, but all the same stretched himself on it. Now he thought to himself how pleasant it would be were a young damsel to come there and gently stroke his legs. No sooner did the thought arise in his mind than he found a young damsel sitting at his feet and stroking his legs. The traveller felt supremely happy. Presently he felt hungry and thought:.... ' I have got whatever I have wished for; could I not then get some food?" Instantly he found various kinds of delicious food spread before him. He at once fell to eating, and having helped himself to his heart's content, stretched himself again on his bed. He now began to revolve in his mind the events of the day. While thus occupied, he thought, "If a tiger should attack me all of a sudden?" In an instant a large tiger jumped upon him and broke his neck and began to drink his blood. In this way the traveller lost his life. Such is the fate of men in general. Mind you, there is the dread of the tiger behind the gifts you get.

—Sri Ramakrishna